

RIDERS UP



GERALD BEAUMONT



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

RIDERS UP!

RIDERS UP!

BY
GERALD BEAUMONT



D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK :: LONDON :: MCMXXIX

**COPYRIGHT, 1922, BY
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY**

Copyright, 1921, Consolidated Magazine Corp.
Copyright, 1922, Consolidated Magazine Corp.
Copyright, 1921, Ridgeway Company
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

“Mo’ sensitive than a woman; mo’ cou’ageous than a man: the tho’oughbred, suh—God and Vi’ginia!”

TOAST OF THE ARLINGTONS

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS	I
II. SHOOTING STAR	28
III. STAR OF ISRAEL	55
IV. WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME	88
V. THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP	119
VI. OH, SUSANNA!	153
VII. MUD AND NINETY-FIVE	195
VIII. THOROUGHBREDS	232
IX. THE KING OF THE ALSO-RANS . . .	265
X. THE EMPTY STALL	296

RIDERS UP!

I. LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

*Past the paddock and on to the stand,
Whip and heel and spur and hand;
Buckle to buckle and knee to knee—
Bridle to bridle—"Shake her free!
Up on the shoulders—lift her on!
The little mare's got him—on, go on!*

—RHYMES OF A RAILBIRD.

"FOURTEEN HUNDRED!"
"Fifteen!"

"'Fifteen hundred,' says the gentleman; 'fifteen hundred for the little daughter of Lord Valor out of True Blue—a bit dicky in the legs, but no better blood in America. Fifteen, do I hear sixteen? Speak up, boys—she beat Jack Tar a head on the post carrying one hundred and twenty-one pounds! Make it sixteen hundred and you lead her away. Fifteen once . . . Fifteen twice . . .'"

Old Sandy McKee passed a trembling hand across his mouth. His eyes arrested the attention of the man on the box; fingers fumbled in a vest pocket and produced a heavy gold timepiece. He held it up.

RIDERS UP!

"Fifteen and the watch," he quavered. "It's worth two hundred—a double split second repeater, listen!" He pressed a hidden spring. From his upraised hand, a tiny gong sounded the half hour by quarters, and then in deeper cadence the hour itself.

The auctioneer smiled indulgently. "Fifteen hundred and the watch for Lady Courageous."

"Seventeen hundred," said a voice.

Sandy McKee lowered his hand. His shrunken figure relapsed into drab nonentity; his faded blue eyes studied the tan turf at his feet.

There was a sudden movement on the inner fringe of the circle. A man in his early thirties, attired a bit too jauntily for the average horseman, stepped forward and held up two fingers to the auctioneer. The latter nodded.

"Two thousand dollars from the owner of Lady Courageous. Mr. Pennington retains his mare. That ends the sale, boys." He scrambled off the stand, and the crowd melted, leaving Tod Pennington frowning upon Sandy McKee.

"You're an old fool, Sandy," commented Pennington, "an obstinate old fool. Not alone must you come clear across the continent to fight with the best trainer in Kentucky, but you would beggar yourself for a stall-warmer."

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

Sandy McKee winced. "Not that," he protested, "she'll start again."

"Piffle! Here, boy!" Pennington hailed a passing groom. "Bring out Lady Courageous."

But McKee interfered hastily. "You can't show me anything I don't know. I've slept in her stall every night for two weeks. She has bowed tendons on the two front legs, her feet are contracted and she has a bad frog."

"And the devil's own temper," added Pennington. "Now, why do you want her?"

"Come with me," said Sandy. They walked along the row of whitewashed stalls until they came to a little bay mare arching her neck over the half-door of her compartment.

"Easy," warned Pennington, and kept a respectful distance, but McKee walked quietly to the stall door and stood there with arms at his sides.

For a moment the mare withdrew her head with the ears twitching, but as McKee made no move, the velvet nose protruded timidly, and as a blind girl might pass deft fingers lightly over her lover's face the delicate tactile hairs and sensory nerves located in the soft pad at the end of the muzzle felt of Sandy McKee's hands, and up along one arm to his neck and features. Still he made no move. The shapely head lowered to his shoulder and nudged impatiently.

RIDERS UP!

"Memory," explained McKee. He slid one hand along the mare's neck and rubbed the space between the ears and then down over the eyes, pressing his fingers firmly over the skin and always in one direction. "She remembers how her mother licked her on the head and neck when she was a foal; it's better than patting, isn't it, old girl? Now, listen!"

He lowered his head over cupped hands. As if from far off came the faint strains of the bugle-call to the post.

Lady Courageous jerked her head in the air, small ears quivering. Her bandaged legs trembled. In the luminous eyes the high lights danced as she stared with distended nostrils in the direction of the track.

"Imagination," whispered Sandy McKee. "She sees herself facing the webbing right now. Easy, you lil' ol' red stockings—I shouldn't have teased you."

He came slowly back to Pennington.

"Why does a man want his own child?" he asked simply. "When Lady Courageous was foaled, Colonel Pennington says to me: 'Sandy, I'll let you name her and I want you to watch over her like she was your own flesh and blood. The grandest little filly in the world, Sandy—all of Lord Valor's courage and stamina, and all of her

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

mother's speed and gentleness. Some day, Sandy, she'll win the Pennington Handicap just as her sire did.' So I named her Lady Courageous and used to lay awake nights worrying about her. And then," Sandy McKee's eyes wandered over the empty grandstand in the distance—"then—the Colonel died, and you left me at the farm, and hired Jake Mantor, who rushed her out as a two-year-old, and—"

He did not finish.

Under the mask of cynical indifference that contrasted oddly with Tod Pennington's nut-brown eyes and boyish features, the warm blood coursed to the surface.

"I thought it was something like that when you held up the watch," he commented. "My father's, wasn't it?"

McKee nodded. "He gave it to me when Valor hung up the mile and a quarter mark at Latonia."

"And the little mare—what were you going to do with her?"

Sandy McKee turned wide eyes on his former employer. "Why, take her back to California and build her up again."

"And then?"

Sandy shrugged. "I don't know," he muttered, but the light in his pale eyes betrayed him.

RIDERS UP!

"Damn me!" exclaimed Pennington, "damn me, if I don't think you'd bring her back in the old colors and start her in the Pennington Handicap!"

Sandy McKee's lip twitched an affirmative. Somehow, standing there in his faded clothes, sublime in the singleness of his faith and purpose, he seemed to typify not so much the romance and vicissitudes of the race-track as the unfaltering and faithful spirit of the thoroughbred.

Tod Pennington tore a leaf from a pocket memorandum-book and penciled a brief inscription. He handed the paper to Sandy McKee.

It was a bill of sale acknowledging for value received the transfer of Lady Courageous. With something strangely suggestive of old Colonel Pennington's charm of manner, he hushed the other's stammering.

"My thanks to you, Sandy. Take the little mare west and be good to her. The old cerise and green forever, eh, Sandy! Gad, I didn't think there was that much sentiment left in the world. You Scotch are a wonderful people. God's luck to you!"

That night, Sandy McKee and all that was left of the famous Pennington string departed in a box-car for California. Not until long after-

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

ward did McKee learn that the sale he had attended that day had been for no other purpose than to pay off the family debts, and that he had left Tod Pennington lacking just two thousand dollars of having a cent to his illustrious name.

The little town of Pleasanton drowns in the sunlight forty-one miles east of San Francisco. It is a pearl strung on a slender stream that winds over the level floor of the Livermore Valley. Low hills encircle it, tawny yellow in summer, emerald green in winter. From an eminence to the southwest the Hacienda del Pozo de Verona looks down upon a race-track.

Hither in the winter months from Canada on the north and the Atlantic seaboard on the east come shrewd trainers and gallant horses seeking the seclusion of the quiet hills and soft Arcadian air. And into this setting one late October afternoon plodded a little old man leading a broken-down bay mare. Half-way along the shaded lane that stretches from the Southern Pacific station to the long lines of cool stalls the man paused to look back solicitously.

The mare shifted her weight from one bandaged foreleg to the other and with upraised head stared at her surroundings.

"We're almost there," encouraged the man,

RIDERS UP!

"just a little ways more. Didn't know where old Sandy was taking you, did you? See anything familiar about those barns right ahead?"

Lady Courageous whinnied and limped forward.

"Uh-huh," corroborated McKee, "same old home; going right back to the very stall where you was born, too! Ain't changed a bit, Lady—not one bit. Still got your mammy's and your daddy's pictures on the wall, and it's cool and dark and quiet. That ain't all, either, Lady; tomorrow old Doc Kelly looks you over and we start to patch them legs."

Chuckling contentedly he led the way along familiar paths past the office of Barney Gilligan, superintendent of the track, and along the last avenue of low white stables. He stopped triumphantly before the open half-door of a box stall at the extreme end.

"Pretty far from the winner's circle at Latonia," he admitted, "pretty dog-gone far. Handicapper's slipped us top weight sure enough. Go on in, Lady—here's where we show those wise birds in Kentucky what a cripple can do."

The mare entered obediently, and he busied himself removing her hood and traveling wraps and scurrying around after water and feed.

Old Doc Kelly was bald and fat. He came

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

waddling up the following day for the promised inspection.

Through half-closed eyes he studied the little mare as she limped from her stall, appraising the exquisitely molded head and long neck, the clear-cut throat, the sharp withers, and the deep chest that afforded unusual room for heart and lungs.

"H'm," he acknowledged, "she's got the Lord Valor strain all right, his big heart and her mother's small bones. That's the trouble; she'd carry a house and drop in her tracks before she'd quit."

His fingers probed the injured tendons and the swollen ankles. One after another he raised the hoofs and studied them. Finally he straightened up and spat reflectively.

"Breed her," he advised, "she's through!"

Sandy McKee's lower jaw dropped and then set stubbornly with a click.

"I say she runs again!"

"All right," rumbled the other, "on the day she does I lay you a thousand to one," and he waddled indignantly away.

Not by the slightest expression of his face or voice did Sandy McKee betray to Lady Courageous the fear that was in his heart. He knew too much about horses for that.

"Old Doc Kelly's got a funny way about him,"

RIDERS UP!

he confided to the mare that night, "but he means all right. Next week he'll be hanging over the door just waiting for a chance to help out; you see if he don't! Darned if you're not beginning to perk up already. That liniment's doing the work, old girl—you're looking better every minute."

The next day he set about cutting down the contracted hoofs and rectifying the horny pad in the sole of the right forefoot. "No more shoes for a while, old girl," he chirruped; "going to let you stand barefoot till you spread them hoofs. Just going to make you a mud-pack for that bad frog—funniest little old boot you ever saw—just you wait and see!"

Lady Courageous nickered and bent warm nostrils to his coat pocket. He produced the customary lump of sugar and stroked her neck and flanks with long firm pressure of his wrinkled hands.

In the evening he returned bearing a leather arrangement half full of soft blue mud. The mare bent an inquisitive muzzle over the strange object, and then wrinkled her nose and upper lip.

"Now, now," he scolded, "I'm not going to ask you to eat it. Here, give me the foot!" The

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

hoof yielded to his touch and over it he fitted the improvised boot.

"There," he grunted, "that's the best little old mud in the country—right out of the well of Verona. Mind you don't knock it loose!"

That night Lady Courageous leaned one shoulder against the side of the stall and eased herself to the straw bed, holding her right foreleg gingerly from the floor. McKee grinned appreciatively.

For several days he concentrated on the task of reducing the swelling over the tendons, applying cool dry bandages the last thing at night and wet cloths for the day treatment.

He looked up one day to find the light from the doorway blocked by the figure of old Doc Kelly.

"Why don't you use the firing iron?" demanded the veterinarian. "Cross-fire both legs and then blister them. Bring her down to my place."

"Go on away," bristled McKee; "get out of my light."

The rotund figure of the man in the doorway swelled to the proportions of a young ballon tugging at its fastenings.

"A thousand to one, you old fool!" he yelled, "a thousand says you haven't even got a selling-

plater. I'd operate on your head if it wasn't made o' iron!" He caromed away, snorting the vengeance of heaven on all Scotchmen.

Nevertheless, old Doc Kelly's suggestion bore fruit, for it coincided exactly with an impression that had been gathering strength in McKee's own mind.

"Lady," he whispered to the mare, "I'm afraid we're going to have to do something cruel to you, but it ain't half so cruel after all as keeping you from the barrier when you've been raised for nothing else. Understand, old girl? We're going to have to hurt you; going to burn the skin so that it folds right close to the bone and holds those tendons in place. Then we'll put on your lil' ol' red stockings and by and by—you'll begin running nice and easy, and then faster and faster—and first thing you know, we'll go back to Latonia."

Lady Courageous moved restlessly.

Early in the morning he led her to the veterinarian's quarters. "Here she is," he capitulated, "but if you make a botch of the job, I'll kill you."

Doc Kelly made no botch. His father and his father's father had been students of horseflesh. For all of them it was both a gift and a passion. Hours afterward, when it was all over and Sandy McKee was quivering like a girl who has seen her

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

mother's ghost, the stout man turned a perspiring face on his lifelong friend.

"I'm still laying a thousand to one," he reminded, "but I hope I lose it. She's the gamest little mare that ever drew breath."

"Don't I know it!" flamed McKee.

The winter passed and a California spring painted golden poppies on the emerald hills. Sandy McKee clung stubbornly to a program of bandages, iodine, warm fomentations and a daily parade along the whitewashed stalls—a parade that almost imperceptibly extended toward the mile track that stretched alluringly at the end of the avenues.

And Lady Courageous, hearing never a harsh nor loud word, and conscious only of tender ministrations and a growing strength in the bandaged legs, responded in the only way she knew—with intelligent obedience to her trainer's every suggestion and with implicit faith that all was well.

Then one June evening after a day of gentle exercise on the track itself, followed by Doc Kelly's careful examination of the dry, clean scars, Sandy McKee lifted his voice in an ancient melody of the British barracks. It was characteristic of him that at moments of greatest happiness he should select the most lugubrious of themes.

RIDERS UP!

*Wrap me up in my old stable jacket,
And with footsteps all mournful and slow,
Convey me at night to the graveyard,
And bury this duffer below.*

There were innumerable verses, each one a little more melancholy than the others, and he sang them all; while Lady Courageous flexed small ears forward and back—aware from his tone that her master was unusually content.

From then on the work-outs became more strenuous, and the little mare, nothing loath, fought for her head as McKee, standing up on the rail, hat in one hand and watch in the other, waved to the boy on her back to hold her in.

Never once did Sandy McKee neglect to praise her extravagantly after every effort. In the evenings, by the light of a coal-oil lamp, he studied the racing forms.

August came. Lady Courageous was then five years old, silken coated, trim of limb and in her prime, with a year's rest behind her—a year spent in an equine paradise.

Once again her owner sought out old Doc Kelly and laid a heavy gold watch on the latter's dusty desk.

"The fall meeting at Latonia opens in a couple of weeks," he said. "Me and lil' ol' red stockings need a couple of hundred. Can you spare it?"

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

The veterinarian picked up the watch and examined it carefully. Then he laid it down, his eyes twinkling.

"Am I a pawnbroker?" he demanded. "Not a cent do I lend you or any other man, but," he added, reaching for a check-book, "I pay my bets—promptly!"

McKee took the check and noted that it was for one thousand and one dollars.

"Not a word, you old fool," threatened Doc Kelly, "not one word—only wire me when she starts; there is a little more where that came from and it is a wise man who knows when to hedge."

The trainer walked out the door and back to Lady Courageous. He made a trumpet of his hands and sounded softly the call to post. The mare quivered to attention.

"Traveling clothes, Lady," he exulted, "going back to old Latonia—going to start this very night!"

The fall meeting had been on for two weeks when McKee from Latonia sent a telegram to the New York office of Tod Pennington. It read:

Mile in forty-four on soft track. Come at once.

SANDY.

Pennington showed up three days later.

"Not Lady Courageous. You don't mean—?"

RIDERS UP!

McKee beamed. "Who else? To-morrow morning at five o'clock I'll let her step for you."

In the cool, sharp air of the early morning Pennington met McKee at the stable entrance to the track just as Lady Courageous appeared with a stable-boy on her back. The track had dried out.

"Half way around in a two-minute jog," instructed the trainer, "then let her down to forty-eight."

The boy nodded and cantered away while the two men moved to the rail, watch in hand. Intently they studied a drab blur moving swiftly around to the half-mile post where the mare's stride suddenly lengthened. McKee's thumb pressed the stem of his watch.

A little later when the mare flashed past them her rider's elbows were crooked back and his hands drawn well toward the body. McKee glanced at his timepiece and closed the lid with a satisfied click.

"Under double wraps," he observed quietly, "and a hundred and twenty-five-pound boy."

Pennington's eyes glittered. "Sandy, it's a miracle! Two or three races and she'll be in form."

McKee frowned. "She's ready now, and she runs but one race."

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

"The Pennington Handicap?"

The trainer nodded. "I've entered her already."

Tod Pennington smiled sadly. "Sandy, you're overplaying your hand. There are three horses here that can beat the mare at her best and they'll all start."

"Yes," McKee agreed, "they'll start and a lot of others, but it will be a two-horse race."

"One horse," corrected Pennington, "St. Ivan—the greatest stretch runner in America; a mile and a quarter in 2:02 1-5 seconds. Who can beat him?"

Sandy McKee's pale eyes warmed to fanatical fervor. "My lil' ol' red stockings," he exclaimed fiercely, "that's who'll beat him! That's who'll win the Pennington Handicap. They've never beaten the Pennington colors in that race, and they never will. The Handicap's ours!"

"She'll be twenty to one," mused Pennington.

"Better than that," McKee told him, "she's down for one hundred and twenty-one pounds, the old weight, and she'll run in bandages. Lord Valor's heart and True Blue's speed; forty to one, and a two-horse race!"

"Gad!" breathed Pennington, "I never thought I'd be back at the old game. Ten thousand to the winner, and forty to one! By gad!"

RIDERS UP!

"The old place is for sale," McKee interjected. "It wouldn't take much to fit it up as a stock farm. There's Lady Courageous——"

"You old fox," laughed Tod Pennington, "you'd like to see me keep up the family tradition, wouldn't you? Darned if you haven't got me going, too! Saturday? By gad, you're on! The old wheel of fortune, eh, Sandy? Well, we'll give it one more spin!"

The Friday evening sporting extras and the overnight entry sheets were singularly alike in their tips on the Pennington Handicap. St. Ivan was the unanimous selection, despite his top weight of one hundred and twenty-eight pounds. Friar John was given the second choice, and the Harbridge entry third. Concerning Lady Courageous the comment was also uniform:

"Been working fast, but first time out in a year. Legs doubtful."

But late that night a watchman patrolling the darkened stables stopped to listen to a voice that sounded a melancholy chant from a distant stall:

*Wrap me up in my old stable jacket;
Put a slab at my head and my toe,
And get you a penknife and scratch there:
"Here lies a poor duffer below."*

Far into the night the dirge continued.

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

The morning ushered in gray clouds scudding over a track that was lightning fast. Tod Pennington showed up early in the afternoon with four trusted agents. He sought out Sandy McKee.

"I'm heeled, Sandy; you and I are fifty-fifty if the little mare comes home in front."

The trainer shook his head. "The purse is enough for me; that and the Lady. You'll need everything you can make to get the farm back and rebuild the stable."

"Fifty-fifty," insisted Tod Pennington; "we're partners no matter what happens!"

The first slates on the mile and a quarter Pennington Handicap with a field of eight starters gave prices on St. Ivan at even money, with Lady Courageous chalked up at twenty-five to one, but almost immediately the former was cut down to four to five and then one to two under the pressure of public choice. When the odds on the McKee entry had lengthened to forty to one, Tod Pennington and his quartet of commissioners, at a given signal, hit the betting ring from five points of vantage.

The mare's former owner was recognized at the third book by "Big Jake" Schaefer. In answer to the latter's "H'lo, Tod, how you playin' 'em?" he held up a roll of bills:

RIDERS UP!

"Hundred on the Lady to win."

"Four thousand to a hundred, Lady Courageous," droned "Big Jake."

The man at his elbow rubbed the slate clear and the bookmaker leveled his glasses at the other price-lists. One after another of the pencilers were sponging off the odds on Lady Courageous. Schaefer lowered his glasses and called to Pennington:

"Who's this Sandy McKee?"

"My father's old trainer," Tod replied.

The bookmaker's eyes narrowed. Over at his left, one book was still offering forty to one. He beckoned a messenger and thrust out a handful of currency. "Place and show on Lady Courageous," he whispered, "over at Connelly's—quick!"

The messenger and Pennington clawed their way through the crowd, followed by a train of those who are always on the alert for "wise" money. Billy Connelly saw them coming and guessed their purpose. He shook his head and wheeled around to the board. Opposite the name of Sandy McKee's mare appeared the figures "15-6-3."

Pennington held up a hundred-dollar bill. "Lady Courageous on the nose."

"Fifteen hundred to a hundred," grunted the bookmaker and rubbed his slate again. Penning-

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

ton turned. Big Jake's messenger was fighting his way across the ring to where the New Orleans book was stubbornly holding out odds of thirty to one. In the swirling mass of humanity struggling at the base of the New Orleans platform, Pennington recognized two of his agents.

The book held out against the onslaught a minute longer and then declined all further bets on the McKee entry. Meanwhile, hundreds of men had had time to ask one another what it was all about; to look up Lady Courageous's last performance; to note that she was running under the old Pennington colors, and to recall the turf tradition regarding a Pennington entry in the Pennington Handicap. The rumor spread like fire over dead grass that the mare was primed for a killing, and in three minutes the rush toward Lady Courageous became a stampede. St. Ivan receded to even money.

Tod Pennington made his last bet at six to one and then hurried to the paddock. He was in time to hear Sandy McKee give his last instructions to little Travers, a sixteen-year-old boy, whom the trainer had picked out after one glance at the intelligent gray eyes and another at the long slender fingers.

"Remember," McKee said, "no whip nor spurs; when the time comes, talk to her. Keep close to

RIDERS UP!

St. Ivan as you can without getting pocketed; he's all you have to beat."

The boy nodded and McKee gave him a leg up. Lady Courageous was trembling in every dainty limb, her eyes twin pools of liquid flame. She reared up, pawing with bandaged forelegs, and McKee clung to the bridle.

"Easy, you lil' ol' red stockings," he soothed. "I know what you're waiting for; Sandy knows—there!"

"All right!" cried some one.

McKee released his hold and swept a final caress over the mare's saturated coat. One after another the starters in the Pennington Handicap filed out of the paddock.

A bugle sounded.

"Come on," Pennington urged. "I've got a good place saved for us on the rail."

The field of thoroughbreds paraded past the grandstand and then turned back toward the barrier, St. Ivan, number one horse, leading the way.

One glance at the majestic son of Petersboro, looking every inch his class, and another at Lady Courageous now strangely docile, cantering past on bandaged legs, and the crowd surged back into the ring.

Once more the cry of "St. Ivan to win!" echoed through the enclosure. Odds of one to four were

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

being written when the shout: "They're off!" coupled with the shrill clamor of an electric gong, sent the human tide sweeping again toward rail and grandstand.

Tod Pennington's heart sank within him, but Sandy McKee, standing erect and with a flush on each withered cheek, smiled as the field thundered past the grandstand.

Southern Belle, the Harbridge entry, carrying one hundred and twelve pounds, had the early foot, followed closely by Captain Adams and Starlight. The others were bunched, with St. Ivan lying in fifth place and Lady Courageous still holding to her position on the outside.

At the first turn the field shifted kaleidoscopically, stringing out into a moving blur of color. McKee's eyes failed him.

"The Lady," he questioned, "where is she?"

Pennington stared through puckered eyes. "I can't make her out. Sixth, I think—no, that's Starlight, almost the same colors—St. Ivan is seventh. Ah, there he goes!"

A jubilant roar sounded from the packed stands. The race was nearing the half-mile post and St. Ivan was moving up on the outside. As easily as a child gathering up its toys, the great black horse picked up his field. One after another he

RIDERS UP!

passed until he took command with two lengths of daylight between him and the tiring Southern Belle. In his admiration for the gallant leader, Pennington almost forgot his own interest in the race and the little old man standing at his shoulder.

He was recalled to his surroundings by McKee's hoarse voice: "The Lady, where is she?"

Again Pennington shook his head. His eyes could not make out the familiar cerise and green. He turned to a man at his side who was watching the race through field-glasses.

"Can you make out Lady Courageous?"

"No," the man replied. "I plunged on her, too." He looked hastily at his program and again at the blur of color now nearing the far turn.

"By God!" he exclaimed, "there are only seven horses out there and there were eight starters. She must have broken down!"

A strangled cry came from Sandy McKee. Three pairs of eyes swept the track that lay back of the runners. It was empty.

The man with the glasses leveled them again. Then he took off his hat, flung it down and jumped on it.

His wild yell was swallowed in a roar of wonder that swelled from the blackened grandstand. For the mighty son of Peterboro, swinging around

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

into the home-stretch, disclosed for the first time that he was not alone. Running at his shoulder and on the outside where she had been from the first quarter a little bay mare was measuring St. Ivan stride for stride!

They made the turn, the boy on St. Ivan hugging the fence, his left boot held clear of the top rail. The mare swung a trifle wide and then closed again resolutely.

Sandy McKee leaned far over the railing. His eyes caught that for which he was waiting,—the flash of red bandages in the sunlight.

"There she comes!" he whooped. "There's my lil' ol' red stockings; there she comes!"

The mare's quick recovery of the lost ground told its story to the boy on the black horse. From under the peak of his cap he shot one panicky glance at Lady Courageous, and then went to the bat. That instant of quick fear, communicating itself to the sensitive son of Petersboro, put the most cruel of all handicaps on a gallant horse. He responded desperately as his rider's whip rose and fell.

"Now," breathed Sandy McKee, "talk to her!"

As if in answer to the trainer's prayer, lost in the vocal vortex, little Travers swung forward on the shoulders of Lady Courageous. His hands

RIDERS UP!

moved out on the reins to within a few inches of the bit. With face bowed to the mare's neck, his small arms gave with the bob of her head.

Down they came, St. Ivan on the rail; Lady Courageous at his right! A shrill hysterical scream from a woman leaning over the grandstand banister rose above the deeper clamor:

"Pennington! The Pennington finish!"

The cry awoke memories of turf tradition. The throbbing roar of "St. Ivan!" was blasted by the exultant yells of the long-shot fraternity: "Lord Valor!" "True Blue!" "Pennington!"

For the bay mare, true to her colors and her ancestry, disdaining the rail and asking only for room—plenty of room—was coming down the center of the track just as her sire and her mother had done in the days of their glory.

Half-way down the stretch St. Ivan, aware that the greatest test of his career had come, gave to his rider all that was in him, but Lady Courageous was racing for Sandy McKee! By heart-breaking inches she nosed ahead at the paddock, and at the wire it was Lady Courageous by a neck and going away!

Petrified by the miracle of it all, Tod Pennington clung to the railing, eyes mechanically set on an iron framework across the track into which white numbers were slowly dropping. First a "2,"

LIL' OL' RED STOCKINGS

then a "o," then another "2." He waited breathless, but there were no more numbers. A great cry rose from the stands.

"S-Sandy!" stuttered Pennington. "Sandy, a track record! A cripple and a track record!"

But Sandy McKee was no longer at his side. A little old man was crouching in the winner's circle in front of the judges' stand; crouching there with anxious eyes fastened upon a bay mare cantering back to him on bandaged legs that still moved clean and strong.

Little Travers held up his hand; caught the judges' smiling nod, and slid from his mount. The stands rocked, and the band played. Gray-haired men clapped Sandy McKee on the back and shouted his praises. But he saw only a little bay mare nudging forward to be petted; he heard only the shrill whimper of feminine ecstasy that was blown through the blood-red nostrils of Lady Courageous.

II. SHOOTING STAR

*A star that bursts the vault of night
And heats the heavens in its flight;
Squanders its wealth in one brave show
Till naught remains save afterglow.*

WHEN Lady Courageous, running in bandages, beat St. Ivan a neck on the post in the Pennington Handicap, thereby repaying her debt to Sandy McKee, her owner took the little bay mare back to California, and there, with Tod Pennington, set about rebuilding the once famous Pennington stable.

Operating as partners, they bought back Bonnie Brae, the family stock-farm in the Livermore Valley, and undertook to resurface the circular mile track and modernize the training quarters from which in the old days Lord Valor, True Blue and other celebrated Pennington horses had gone forth to fame and glory.

There was one point upon which Sandy McKee insisted with Scotch stubbornness.

"All that I asked of her, the Lady did. Never again will I send her to the post."

To which Tod made reply, one arm around the

SHOOTING STAR

trainer's shoulder and looking for all the world like old Colonel Pennington himself: "She's your mare, Sandy, and you're a sentimental old idiot; but I love you."

The "sentimental old idiot," sniffed disparagingly and promptly consigned the last three words to the treasure-chest of his memory, along with such visible associations as old Colonel Pennington's watch, presented when Valor hung up the mile-and-quarter mark at Latonia, and a pair of faded red bandages with which Sandy McKee had brought about the return of Lady Courageous.

While Tod Pennington supervised the work of reconstruction, McKee took Lady Courageous north to Sonoma County, the Valley of the Moon, and there she was mated to Cloud o' War, the great Montgomery stallion for whom three foreign governments had bid unsuccessfully.

Bruce Montgomery, millionaire sportsman, laid down but one condition.

"You know my rule, Sandy; the get stays in America, I want this country to retain the peer of the thoroughbreds."

"That suits me," said Sandy. "There's nothing too good for the Pennington colors. All the Lady lacks is bone and weight, and your horse has both. The foal will be short above and long

RIDERS UP!

below, and if he has the Valor heart, you can look for a world-beater."

Far into the spring the work of rehabilitating Bonnie Brae went on; and in June, leaving a string of yearlings in the new stables, McKee and Pennington collected a small but likely string of seasoned horses and campaigned with fair success in the East and South, winding up at Latonia, where Firelight, a six-year-old gelding bought from the Kearney stable, romped home in the Pennington Handicap leading a respectable field by two lengths.

In winter they returned, and Sandy McKee found Lady Courageous waiting patiently in her stall, yearning perhaps for the once familiar bugle-call, but with the high lights in her eyes softened by the fact that she was heavy with foal. By the sense of smell, by the tone of his voice, by the familiar movements of his body, the mare recognized him, and nickered a greeting.

Though many trainers never talk to their horses, on the theory that the human voice is unpleasant to equine ears, Sandy McKee had his own ideas on the subject. The pitch of his quiet voice was unusually low, and when addressing a hot-blooded horse, it was always accompanied by the slow, firm stroke of wrinkled hands. Other train-

SHOOTING STAR

ers had to admit that McKee had a way with a horse that was past explaining.

Sandy assumed personal charge of Lady Courageous. He saw to her food and bedding and ministered to her comfort the last thing at night. It was on one such occasion, when he was leading the blanketed mare to water rather late in a January evening, that there occurred an event destined to have a marked effect on the fortune of the Bonnie Brae farm.

The dark velvet of the western sky was suddenly rent by a swift-rushing meteor that blazed a golden trail overhead, lighting the countryside. McKee stopped short; and the mare, flinging up her head, haunched back and crashed against the water-trough. Her terror increased. McKee clung to the halter and was pulled from his feet as Lady Courageous wheeled sharply and once more collided with the wooden stand. The meteor faded behind the purple hills to the east, and the mare quivered to a standstill. McKee examined her and clucked reprovingly.

"Wasn't nothing but a shooting-star," he complained. "What do you want to bang yourself around like that for? Just for that, you go back to bed."

But when she was again safe in her stall, Lady Courageous, instead of nosing at her food, moved

RIDERS UP!

restlessly from side to side, wrinkled her upper lip in a whimper of distress and refused to be quieted. McKee studied her anxiously, and then, instead of going to his own quarters, he procured a collapsible cot and pair of blankets and prepared to spend the night outside the stall.

It was one of McKee's many peculiarities that on the eve of a big race, or an event such as he now anticipated, he should elect to find relief in song.

Intermittently through the night there rose from the hushed stable an ancient rollicking melody of the Queen's Hussars:

*And whenever you're jolly well licked, dear lad,
And the enemy's closing in,
Remember the day when, one in five,
We rode to the Russian guns alive—
Rode to the guns, and before we died,
Spiked the beggars and turned the tide!*

Toward morning the chant came to an abrupt close, and a lantern light moved in and out of the stall. A groom awoke Tod Pennington at daylight.

"Mr. McKee wants you to come to the stables at once," he said.

Pennington dressed hurriedly and made his way down the avenue of maples. And there, in

SHOOTING STAR

the darkened stall, he found Sandy McKee bending over a seal-brown foal that squirmed feebly on the straw under its mother's caresses.

"Colt," whispered Sandy, "and he's come ahead of time. But didn't I tell you he'd be 'short above and long below'; look at those legs!"

Pennington's eyes rounded. "Glory!" he ejaculated. "But you'll have to feed him with a bottle."

McKee nodded. "I'm having some flannels heated. We'd better go out now."

On the tanbark corridor Pennington halted "What shall we name him?"

The trainer mused a moment and then he related the incident of the night before. "I'm not much on hunches," he admitted, "but this one is pretty strong, and it makes a nice name: suppose we call him Shooting Star?"

And though Tod Pennington, with what almost amounted to a premonition, warned Sandy that a shooting star comes from nowhere and ends in the same place, that was the name finally selected for the son of Lady Courageous. . .

Almost before they knew it, the colt flesh disappeared and Shooting Star was a yearling, an impetuous, long-legged clown of the stable whose chief characteristic was a tendency to jump out of his skin at the least provocation. Two days

RIDERS UP!

after being backed he was following other thoroughbreds around the track, and in a week or so he was fairly way-wise.

Meanwhile the Pennington stables expanded. More seasoned horses were added to the string, together with a few youngsters, including Machine Gun, a handsome bay colt by Cloud o' War out of the Kentucky mare Maribelle Lee.

Trained especially for the event, Firelight repeated her success in the Pennington Handicap, but she had to be ridden out hard to last a nose in front of Captain Davis. More and more horsemen were making it an object of honor to break the Pennington grasp on the Latonia classic.

"The game is coming back," Pennington commented. "Next year some of those two-year-olds will be hard to beat."

McKee nodded. "I'm glad to see it come; we'll break a few watches ourselves."

The younger man smiled indulgently. "What with?" he inquired.

"Shooting Star."

Pennington's grin broadened. "The colt will break plenty of barriers and a few necks, but the only way he'll ever smash a watch is by jumping on it. I'm banking on his half-brother."

Sandy McKee puffed reflectively at his pipe a moment. "All other things being equal," he de-

SHOOTING STAR

liberated, "I pick the colt for what I see through the window of his eye when he's excited. The high lights for courage and stamina, and the flame of the ruby for—" He paused.

"For what?"

McKee shrugged. "I don't really know," he admitted. "Imagination, perhaps, or desire. It's what makes a thoroughbred run out a race on a broken leg. Lady Courageous had it; so did Lord Valor and True Blue. It's almost a Pennington characteristic."

"What about Machine Gun?"

"It's there," admitted the trainer, "but not to the same extent as in Shooting Star. The Star has almost too much for my liking—too much fire, and I don't understand it. I never felt that way before about a horse."

The long, pleasant days slipped past, and as Shooting Star approached racing condition, his temperamental peculiarities became more pronounced. Race-horses and athletes are alike in that respect; the closer they approach to being on edge, the more difficult it is to handle them.

The Pennington horses moved to New Orleans, and on New Year's Day, when the son of Lady Courageous, by virtue of racing rules, became a two-year-old, he sidled to the post for his maiden

RIDERS UP!

scramble in a three-furlong dash. A plunging, sweating tangle of nerves, he broke the barrier twice, kicked one horse out of the running, and when the webbing finally shot up, won by six lengths in thirty-five seconds flat.

The début amazed Tod Pennington and transported Sandy McKee to the seventh heaven. Shooting Star was a big colt, full of run and fire. He won his next two starts, this time at three and a half furlongs; and veteran horsemen hailed him as the king of the Southern two-year-olds. The fame of Cloud o' War as a sire, and Lady Courageous as a broodmare, spread over the racing world.

But just before the meeting closed, McKee entered the colt in a four-and-one-half furlong race on a fast track, and he finished absolutely last after spread-eagling his field up to the final furlong.

At Lexington they tried him again with the same result, and then Sandy McKee realized that he had a problem on his hands.

"Morning Glory," averred Pennington. "The colt lacks bottom."

The trainer scowled. "I say he's got bottom and speed; it's nervousness and ambition. I feared it all along. He runs half the race in the paddock and the other half over the first three fur-

SHOOTING STAR

longs. He's got the Cloud o' War jawbone, and the boy can't rate him."

McKee's analysis proved true. Shooting Star lived up to his name. The two-year-old never looked through a bridle that could lead him from the barrier or over the first quarter-mile; but in that mad dash he burned himself to nothing. He worked out as fast as he raced, and no boy could make him take a jog. With the flash of the barrier, Shooting Star was out in front, giving everything that was in him at the wrong time.

McKee was too shrewd a trainer not to recognize that this tendency to be a front-runner was so much a part of the colt's nature that it was unwise to attempt to curb it. There was nothing to do but make the best of it. He left all his sympathy and affection with Shooting Star and turned his mind and talents to Machine Gun.

Here again the cerise and green of the Pennington stables were sported by a sensation. The shapely son of Maribelle Lee made his début in the Junior Stakes, and so closely had he been tabbed by the clockers and the railbirds that he went to the post a favorite, and justified the hopes of the stable by winning handily from a classy field over five furlongs. Machine Gun was the reverse of his half-brother, an intelligent, well-behaved colt who permitted himself to be rated nicely, and

RIDERS UP!

showed a tendency to come from behind. He finished his two-year-old season unbeaten.

Tod Pennington was inclined to be jubilant, but he took care to temper his enthusiasm in the presence of Sandy McKee.

"Mind you," warned Sandy, "Shooting Star is the better of the two—only he doesn't know how to distribute his speed. Some day he will learn, and then you will see a race-horse worthy of the Pennington colors."

Pennington threw an affectionate arm around McKee's drooping shoulders. "All things are possible on a race-track," he consoled.

But Shooting Star showed no indication of any better understanding of his duties. McKee accepted the situation as gracefully as his Scotch obstinacy permitted, and when the next season rolled around, coupled the half-brothers as running companions and sent them after three-year-old honors together. Almost from the start they proved an invincible combination, Shooting Star killing off all the early competition in the race, and Machine Gun unlimbering in the stretch.

The faster the pace, the better for the courageous stake-horse who comes from behind. Shooting Star led the field over the first quarter in .22 and the half-mile post by .46 1-5; and by that time most of the contenders were dizzy. Many a jockey

SHOOTING STAR

who tried to lay off that terrific pace found himself nevertheless influenced by the sight of that flying figure far out in front. Experience told him that Shooting Star would come back to the field, but anxiety and caution prompted him to keep within driving distance in case the unexpected should happen and the bay colt forget to quit.

But up in the press boxes where the form-charts were compiled, and in the few pool-rooms which still managed to secure direct wire service, the official call was always the same when the Pennington pair were entered in a mile or better.

"They're off—Shooting Star in the lead. . . . At the quarter, Shooting Star by three lengths. . . . At the half, Shooting Star by ten lengths. . . . At the three-quarters, Shooting Star by a nose. . . . Into the stretch—" Here the call varied for the first two horses and then resumed its familiar: "Machine Gun third. . . . Here's the winner: Machine Gun by two lengths."

Shooting Star never attained the honor of a call after the three-quarter pole was past. Gradually he began to understand that such a thing was not expected of him. Little Travers, who usually had the leg up, made no attempt to press his mount when the field began to overhaul them, for both horse and man were aware that they were due to be passed at the right time by O'Neill on Machine

RIDERS UP!

Gun; and as Terry sported the cerise and green, what did it matter?

The son of Lady Courageous finished in the ruck and then was led away shamelessly to the stables, where he ran at his groom open-mouthed, kicked over water-buckets, scattered his feed and behaved with characteristic clownishness.

It was about this time that turfmen began to discuss the possibilities of a match-race between Machine Gun and the crack Canadian three-year-old Trafalgar. The latter had made racing history by winning the Canadian Derby in his first start, and like Machine Gun, he had never been beaten. He came from a long line of English Derby winners, and he was regarded so generally as invincible over a mile or longer that few horsemen had the temerity to risk the reputation of their stables against him.

Tod Pennington received an invitation to bring his stable across the border. He laid the matter before Sandy McKee.

"If they want the race, let them come after it," advised the trainer cannily. "Ten thousand to the winner, a mile and a quarter, and old Latonia in October."

"The Pennington Handicap?"

"Why not? If they think Trafalgar can take it away from us, that's their chance."

SHOOTING STAR

"Right as usual," Tod acknowledged. "There's nothing like meeting a man on your own ground."

All through the summer months, while Shooting Star and Machine Gun continued to campaign successfully on the Western tracks, and Trafalgar hung up mark after mark at the Montreal, Windsor, and New York tracks, conjecture as to what would happen in the event the two horses ever met was the source of argument wherever horsemen gathered.

It was more patriotism than judgment that influenced American turf followers to support the chances of the Pennington colors, for the Canadian king, according to the speed-sheet, figured to have the edge on the American champion. Still, it was so small a margin that track condition, relative horsemanship and any of the factors that come under the general heading of racing luck, might well determine the result.

From the time that it was first suggested, it was foreordained that public opinion would sooner or later force the match. Major Ludlow, who owned Trafalgar, was both a millionaire and a good sportsman. Late in the summer he announced his intention of shipping his stable to Kentucky for the fall meeting, and this was accepted to mean that the monarch of the Canadian

RIDERS UP!

turf would measure strides with Machine Gun in the Pennington Handicap.

On the day Trafalgar entered his car at Montreal, Sandy McKee canceled all engagements for both Shooting Star and Machine Gun, and concentrated all his skill and energy on the task of fitting the half-brothers for their greatest effort.

Almost immediately the race assumed international significance. There were rumors of a pool formed by British interests to back the Ludlow colors, not alone in this country but abroad. Bruce Montgomery, owner of Cloud o' War, telegraphed from California that he would support the Pennington stable dollar for dollar with the blue sky the limit. Tod Pennington announced that the stable would not depart from its practice of bracketing Machine Gun and Shooting Star, which satisfied the dopesters that the great son of Maribelle Lee would have a pace set for him that was to his liking, and Trafalgar would have his customary early lead disputed by the famous Pennington "Morning Glory."

The Canadian horse was led to his quarters at Latonia two weeks before the Handicap was scheduled to be run. He took nicely to the climate and the track, and in the early morning hours worked out in a way that left no room for doubt as to his condition.

SHOOTING STAR

As for Sandy McKee, there were few men his equal in putting a race-horse on edge. Machine Gun, freshened up after his rest, breezed over the route under double wraps carrying a hundred-and-twenty-six pound boy without apparent effort. On the other hand, Shooting Star was never more fractious or excitable. He came out in the mornings with two stable-boys hanging to him, and when they turned him loose, he burned up the track until an elevated tail at the three-quarters post indicated that the skyrocket was responding to the natural law of physics.

Into Kentucky from every section of the country streamed the lovers of fast horses. From Tia Juana, New Orleans, Montreal, and wherever the hoof-beat of the thoroughbred finds welcome, veteran turfmen came individually and in parties. On the day before the race, a newspaper estimate placed the probable attendance at fifty thousand.

For the first time in his life Tod Pennington, debonair, easy-natured child of fortune, experienced an overpowering sense of responsibility. In the game for the pure love of it, and because Sandy McKee by the rehabilitation of Lady Courageous had recouped the family fortune, he realized for the first time the vast sum of money that would change hands on the morrow. Nor was it money alone; American prestige itself was at stake—that

RIDERS UP!

and the honor of his father, old Colonel Pennington, who had been in his day the foremost figure of the Kentucky turf. Somehow, it was the memory of the elder Pennington, long since gone to his rest, that quickened the heart-beat of the remaining member of the family.

Late that night Tod felt an unconquerable desire to receive some final assurance of confidence from Sandy McKee, for the trainer had been singularly glum and unconfiding during the last week of preparation. Pennington traversed the hotel corridor and stopped outside McKee's door. Just as he raised his hand to knock, he caught a familiar refrain that came to a close even as he listened:

*And so by the light of the Khyber stars
They knighted the cook of the Queen's Hussars.*

Pennington smiled, straightened his shoulders and, returning to his room, went peacefully to bed.

He was eating an early breakfast in the hotel dining-room when a stable-boy hurried in with a note. The boy's manner warned him that something had happened, but he was unprepared for the message that leaped up at him in McKee's painful scrawl:

Don't say anything but come to the track at once. Machine Gun has gone lame.

SANDY.

SHOOTING STAR

As fast as his car could take him, Pennington reached the track, and with the first sight of McKee's face, his worst fears were realized. Even in that swift moment of consternation he had time to feel sorry for the faded figure standing there quietly at the half-door of the stall.

"Tod, the colt's out of it. I had him shod yesterday, and they must have pricked his hoof."

"You're sure!"

For answer, McKee signaled to a groom, and Machine Gun was led from his stall. The limp was perceptible even as he walked.

Pennington met the blow gamely. He pulled out his watch and studied the hands.

"There's only one thing that we can do," he said briskly. "Notify the stewards at once, and we'll scratch the stable."

"Why the stable?" McKee put the question quietly enough, but his face reddened and there was a stubborn glint in his eyes.

Pennington stared and then spoke up impatiently.

"See here, Sandy—I'm not going to have the colors disgraced in the Pennington Handicap; nor am I going to throw away a million dollars in good American money. If Shooting Star goes to the post, the bets on the stable stand."

"And if he doesn't go," cut in the trainer,

RIDERS UP!

"you'll break the Pennington tradition; and what's more, they'll accuse us of deliberately crippling the horse to dodge the race. Shooting Star goes to the post."

"No."

Mechanically the trainer brushed off his clothes and pulled a battered hat more firmly over his gray hair. "Well, good-by, Tod," he said, and turned away.

The hot blood raced into young Pennington's face and then retreated. He strode after Sandy McKee and whirled the latter around.

"Not that, Sandy—I owe you too much. Start the horse if you want to, but I can't see the point unless you've got something up your sleeve."

The trainer made reply dully: "I haven't anything. We can put O'Neil up and run Shooting Star in blinkers. He's the greatest quarter-horse in America."

"And this is a mile-and-a-quarter race," said Pennington grimly. "O, my holy aunt!"

McKee's face quivered. He was close to breaking down.

"If I had nothing but a selling plater, I'd start him in the colors to-day and go down rooting for him. All I want is to see Shooting Star out there leading Trafalgar; and then I'll feel that I've done all I can."

SHOOTING STAR

"Gad!" exploded Pennington. "Gad—you're a thoroughbred, Sandy; you make me ashamed of myself! Damned if I don't play Shooting Star on the nose. Shake!"

They gripped hands, and while McKee turned back to the stable, Tod Pennington went away to face the music. By ten o'clock every newspaper in the country had the news, and the morning racing extras were on the streets with scare headlines. Track officials issued a formal statement to the effect that the Pennington colt was scratched on legitimate grounds. This statement was coupled with Tod Pennington's assurance that as soon as the colt recovered, he would enter him against Trafalgar for any side-wager the owner of the Canadian horse cared to make. In the meantime the Pennington colors would be defended in the Handicap by Shooting Star.

This last statement evoked ironical comment. Never was there a more complete upset before a race, never a keener disappointment to the American turf. There was only one consolation: Trafalgar would be probably sent against time to demonstrate that even with Machine Gun in the race, he would have been the victor. That thought, coupled with the fact that there is always a large element of the racing public that never plays a favorite under any conditions, sent the gathered

RIDERS UP!

thousands streaming into Latonia shortly after the noon hour.

As though to add to the general gloom, the threatening skies dissolved with the first race into a steady rain, and when the starting board for the Pennington Handicap was displayed opposite the sea of umbrellas, the track itself was coated with three inches of slop.

Tod Pennington was waiting in the paddock when McKee and a groom came in leading Shooting Star, hooded and blanketed. There were nine other starters, the largest field in the history of the handicap. With Machine Gun out of it, and second and third money an open question, at least three entries who would have been scratched otherwise were left on the board. When the thoroughbreds were in their stalls, the center of attraction became the handsome Canadian champion, the satin-black Trafalgar.

"How's the betting going?" inquired McKee.

"Trafalgar all the way," Pennington made answer. "Everybody's hedging. He's one to twenty now, and it's growing worse every minute. They're backing Steel King for the place."

"Shooting Star?"

"Write your own ticket. He carries a fortune in the advance betting, but I'm the only fool who's backing him now."

SHOOTING STAR

McKee grunted. "There's two of us, then." He displayed a green ticket. "I never sent a horse to the post yet that didn't have my support."

He turned to Terry O'Neil, ninety-five pounds of tempered steel, standing quietly in the green blouse and cerise bar of the Pennington stable.

"Do your best, lad; that's all any of us can do. If you can steady him without choking, he may last longer than usual."

The boy nodded. "How about the bat?"

McKee frowned. "I don't like it, but use your own judgment. There's no sense in punishing a horse when he's not a quitter. Shooting Star will race his heart out, and he couldn't do more than that if you whipped him all the way."

There was a commotion at the entrance to the paddock, and a man with a badge ordered the jockeys on their mounts. One by one they filed into the runway leading to the track. The crowd scrambled back to the ring and the stands. In the distance a bugle sounded.

McKee and Pennington shouldered their way to a spot just below the press-box where they could hear the voice of the official caller, and could with the aid of field-glasses obtain a fair view of the start.

The field cantered past the stands and then came splattering past, Trafalgar on the rail,

RIDERS UP!

Shooting Star shaking his head at the unaccustomed hood and moving sidewise in the Number Three position. The others moved past, sedately or plunging, as their temperaments dictated.

Over the multitude settled the expectant hush which tries the nerves of the most experienced horseman. It was a big field, and there was too much at stake for the starter to take any chances. The minutes dragged by, and there were two false starts.

"Shooting Star," muttered Pennington, "he's raising hell. There he goes again."

A bay bolt burst through the webbing, plunged to a stop and went sidling back. They could see the starter waving one arm vigorously.

"The longer they stay there the better," McKee whispered. "The black is carrying one hundred and twenty-seven pounds, and we've got a thirty-pound advantage. Terry's trying to beat the barrier, too! Who's that doing all the kicking?"

"The Hobart mare—Shooting Star crowded her. Terry can't get away with that stuff; he'd better look out; he can't get through—Ah!"

"They're off!"

The cry broke from a thousand throats and rumbled off into a throbbing roar. Down the track a rush of color flared suddenly. The voice of the official caller came to them jerkily:

SHOOTING STAR

"Trafalgar, Sea Queen, Argument, Rock Legion, Jackanapes, St. George, Steel King, Shooting Star——"

Tod Pennington lowered his glasses and laid a hand on the shoulder of McKee.

"It's all in the game, old pal," he comforted. "The colt wheeled the wrong way, and that's no fault of yours. Here they come."

The field swished past the stand, Trafalgar on the rail and setting his own pace two lengths to the good. As they made the first turn, the boy on the Canadian horse looked back over one shoulder.

McKee broke his silence, glasses fixed on the moving blur:

"He's looking for Shooting Star, and there goes Terry on the outside—no, he's cut off."

At the half-mile post, as though to settle beyond all doubt, the fate of the Pennington entry, the horses in the second division shifted again, this time pocketing Shooting Star on the rail in a position from which there was no escape. Rock Legion in third place, held to the rail in front of O'Neil with Sea Queen running at his side and two horses following close behind.

Once more the drone of the caller came to their ears:

RIDERS UP!

"Trafalgar by three lengths, Sea Queen a neck, Shooting Star a length——"

"It's a procession," mourned Pennington, "Trafalgar won't even have to extend himself."

He turned again to McKee, and then as quickly turned away. Down the trainer's withered cheeks from under the leveled field-glasses great tears were rolling. For the first time in the history of the Kentucky turf the cerise and green had failed its supporters in the Pennington Handicap,—tradition had been broken.

Pennington listened stupidly to the voice above him:

"Into the stretch—Trafalgar four. Steel King's a head, Rock Legion a neck, Sea Queen a length, Shooting Star two——"

A big man in a raincoat, standing next to Pennington, interrupted with a warning:

"Look out, boy, you'll bump—Look out—*What did I tell you?*"

A quick grasp of horror rose from the stands. Back of the onrushing Trafalgar two horses went to their knees, throwing their riders into the gray sea. Just in time the pack split, three horses veering to the right and the others taking the rail. In the twinkling of an eye the gap closed again, and then the multitude got a still greater thrill.

Cut off, pocketed, spattered with mud, held

SHOOTING STAR

back by force for the first time in his life, but with all his marvelous burst of speed intact and only ninety-seven pounds on his back, out from the ranks shot the clown of the Pennington stables—the greatest quarter-horse in America!

"Shooting Star!"

It was Sandy McKee who shrieked it first, hurled it ecstatically into the weeping heavens. A thousand voices caught it up, ten thousand, twenty! One glance down the stretch, and all Kentucky knew that the unbelievable thing was possible—the Pennington miracle was unfolding.

The boy on Trafalgar, startled from his security by the tumult, glanced back and saw an equine meteor blazing at his heels. Two sprays of mud shooting up on either side heightened the impression of a comet. Spasmodically he lurched forward, ding-dong, arm and heel, and the black horse responded, but not quickly enough. At the paddock the meteor flashed up neck and neck with the black. Then hammer and tongs on even terms they fought for the wire.

To every jockey his day; to every horse his race! Never in all his life had Shooting Star failed to lead his field; never had he raced on a track of such welcome softness; never had he felt a boy on his back who hurled him irresistibly

RIDERS UP!

forward, who telegraphed with reins and knees:
"Win—win—win!"

Into the long legs and the big heart spurted the strength of his sire and the gallant blood of Lady Courageous. Twenty feet from the finish, boy and horse merged their souls in one last effort, and by the length of a mud-caked nose it was Shooting Star that went under the wire first.

"Pennington—Pennington—Pennington!" The throbbing cry blasted the heavens. The white numbers dropped into place at the judges' stand; the field came blowing back; and still the golden chant of triumphant Kentucky pealed forth. Bare-headed in the rain that beat upon the winner's circle, a young man faced the blackened, roaring stands with one arm around the shoulders of his racing partner, and by impassioned gestures centered the tribute upon Sandy McKee.

III. STAR OF ISRAEL

*'Round she goes, and 'round she goes,
And where she stops nobody knows
But the Lord—and He don't give a whoop!*

THE little marble, succumbing to gravity, rattled against the nickel-plated studs and dropped into a hole.

"*Eighteen* by a mere chance," proclaimed the man in the pink shirt,—"*eighteen, red and even.*"

He swept in the losers' chips with his left hand and deftly duplicated the winning stacks with his right. His placid voice resumed its discourse.

"If you don't speculate, you never accumulate. Come on, boys, double-ought to thirty-six, what could be fairer? 'Tis a game that should be taught in every public school."

The winners laughed, and a man with a green eye shade and cotton cuff-protectors, coming on for the night shift, relieved "Baltimore" Ryan at the roulette table. The latter moved ponderously to the open door and the street in the fading sunlight where once "Aunt Jane" fashioned such excellent *tortillas*, that grateful patrons

RIDERS UP!

named the place in her honor, and it is Tia Juana to this day.

Beyond the expanse of atrocious mud, a green and white race track bordered the international line. Closer stood a row of 'dobe buildings on a street that looked as though it had been constructed overnight by the property man. And in the immediate foreground, a very small stable boy waited patiently for "Baltimore" Ryan to turn eyes in his direction. Finally, the boy's stare accomplished its object.

"Please, Mister Ryan," said the youngster, "can I have a job?"

The gentleman from Baltimore regarded the seeker after employment quizzically.

"What's the name?"

"Kirschberg, sir,—Isidore Kirschberg."

"Help!" said Mr. Ryan. "How old are you, Izzy?"

"Thirteen on this side of the line, sir—sixteen on the American tracks. I come out with the Frawley stable. The boss said you bought the string. I ain't eat since yesterday, Mister,—I got to have a job."

"H'm. Where you from?"

"New York."

Ryan whistled sympathetically. "Three thousand miles from home and the milk ain't dry on

STAR OF ISRAEL

your nose yet. Ain't you the kid that got left on Jessica Wednesday?"

The boy flushed. "Yes, sir; the assistant starter laid the whip on us when we were in our place and standing still. The mare backed up and tried to reach him with her heels just as the webbing sprung. That left us out of it, and 'Father Fred' pulled my boots off. It was my first race, and I'd 'a' won it, Mister; I can ride if they lay off me."

"Baltimore" Ryan chuckled. "Maybe you can," he admitted, "but you'd better change your name and iron out that nose, son. A jockey room is no synagogue."

"Izzy" Kirschberg's eyes darkened and he retreated slowly.

"It ain't no crime to be a Jew, Mister," he said, "and I ain't ashamed of my name, and what's more—nobody's going to make me change it. I don't need to eat, and I can stand a lot of beating yet—but one of these days I'll be booting 'em under the wire. I'll show 'em what a sheeny can do. Just you keep your old job, Mister!"

He pulled his cap down over his eyes and turned away. "Baltimore" Ryan rolled solemnly after him. "Izzy" Kirschberg, noting that he was being followed, broke into a run; so did the occu-

RIDERS UP!

pant of the pink shirt. At the end of the block, the fugitive was overhauled, and the gambler put a paternal arm around the youngster's shoulders.

"Who's beating you?" he puffed.

"Everyb-b-body," sobbed Izzy. He reached down and bared a small leg that bore from ankle to knee the unmistakable imprints of a whip.

The man from Baltimore selected his choicest oath.

"Hell and seven hundred dollars!" he growled, "who did that?"

"The head jockey," confessed Izzy, "he was trying to make me do a Yid dance for the other kids. I wouldn't do it if I knew how, Mister—let me go."

With his disengaged hand, Ryan produced a five dollar bill and put it in the boy's pocket. "Go feed your face," he instructed, "and then tell 'Curly' Jones I said to give you a job. I just bought the Frawley string on spec' and maybe I won't keep it very long, but if anybody tries to pull any rough stuff on you,—come and tell me."

"Thanks," said Izzy, "but I ain't no snitch, Mister. Just you forget what I said about that head jock: I was hungry." He hesitated, digging at the ground with the toe of one shoe.

"Well?"

"There's a chestnut three-year-old, Baltasar—

STAR OF ISRAEL

you'd better hang on to that horse, Mister. He ain't right now, but he's a stake horse."

"That hound!" expostulated Ryan, "why if he ever opens his mouth he'll bark; in a six-horse race he'd finish seventh!"

The boy grinned appreciatively but shook his head. "'Look him up, Mister," he advised, "I'm working for you now, and I'm telling you something. Look him up and you won't sell him."

"All right, Izzy," chuckled Ryan, "you go look into a plate of soup and don't get your ears wet."

The lad departed in the direction of the track restaurant and his new employer stood for several minutes contemplating the retreating figure as if it represented a specimen of the *genus homo* with which he was unfamiliar. Finally the big bookmaker climbed into his car and headed for San Diego. Several times en route he permitted his feelings to express themselves in an explosive grunt.

That night he ran across the "Information Kid" in a billiard room. The "Information Kid" knew everything and did nothing, and was only known to have committed one blunder in his life. That was when he became convinced that because of the juxtaposition of the planets the world was coming to an end. He paid up all his debts and was around two days later proclaiming loudly

RIDERS UP!

that he had been "gyped." Ryan pried him loose from a pool table.

"Kid," he demanded, "who was the original heavyweight champion of England—wasn't it Mendelssohn?"

"It was not," said the Kid. "Maybe you're thinking of Mendoza,—Daniel Mendoza, born in London, 1764, held the title from '92 to '95. His parents came from Spain. He was a Jew—"

"That's the bird," interrupted Ryan—I've been trying to call his name for three hours. How do you account for him being a champion and a Jew. I always thought a Yid was yellow."

The "Information Kid" chalked his cue thoughtfully. "Don't bet your money that way," he admonished. "It was a Jew who died game when He had the best excuse for quitting in the history of the world."

"Well, go ahead. I'm listening."

"This was about two thousand years ago," explained the Kid, "and if memory serves me right, He came back even after they crucified Him, and I think the record still stands."

"You win," Ryan admitted. "Now give me the dope on Baltasar."

Without a moment's hesitation, the "Information Kid" made answer:

STAR OF ISRAEL

"Baltasar was one of the three wise guys from the East. The others were Melchoir and Gaspar. They had sense enough to recognize a real star when they saw one, and they crossed the desert on camels with the first Christmas gifts. They—"

"Forget it," hissed Ryan, "I want to know about that chestnut three-year-old in the Frawley stable. I bought him this morning. What do I care about camels and stars?"

"Well, call your shot!" countered the Kid. "You sprung a Jew on me first, and we were talking about ancient history. How should I know that you've switched to goats?"

The other waved one hand lightly. "Don't stall," he rebuked. "Do you know anything about Baltasar, or must I go somewhere else?"

"I know all about everything," snapped the Kid, and straightway undertook to prove it.

"Baltasar is a three-year-old chestnut by Rock Gold out of Maid Miriam. He has four white legs and a blazed face, stands 16.3, weighs 1000 pounds, girths 68 inches, and has a lot of daylight under his belly. He won the Wide-Awake Stakes on his first start, leading the Belmont colors by two lengths, and he come in first in the Golden Rod Handicap with the best babies in America chasing him all the way. Now he's ready for the glue works. Anything else?"

RIDERS UP!

"Baltimore" Ryan was a little dazed. "Where do you get it all?" he inquired.

"Professional secret," yawned the Kid, "maybe 'Father Fred' is my brother-in-law; maybe I just dreamed it."

"H'm," commented the bookmaker, "one thing more: what should I do with my link of sausage?"

The "Information Kid" chalked his cue for a difficult bank shot, and having missed it, returned to the subject at hand.

"I'd sell him for fifty cents if he was mine," he confided, "but if I had your wad, I'd farm him out for a year and let him spread, and then I'd look him over again."

"Thanks," said Ryan, "that's just what I wanted to know. See you again some time." He turned and headed for the exit. Half way, he heard a very loud and reproachful "*me-ow*," and looked back.

The "Information Kid" was peering under the pool table and addressing in compassionate tones an imaginary cat. "Poor little Kitty," he called, "did the big man forget to feed you after you showed him all your tricks? He's as tight as a rubber overshoe, isn't he, Kitty?"

The gentleman from Baltimore walked back and slipped a five dollar bill in the hand of the cat fancier.

STAR OF ISRAEL

"Excuse me, Kid," he apologized, "I'm getting absent-minded lately; buy the Kitty some cigars."

Ryan would have made a good reporter. When he started after a thing he knew just where to go and he worked fast. Before another hour had passed he had located "Pedigree Pete" Smith, known also as "the little Professor" who was a bug on genealogical trees and structure charts. Pete could start in the middle and trace in either direction the lines of Herod, Matchem and Eclipse, which form the Thoroughbred Trinity.

The authority on equine pedigrees launched into an enthusiastic lecture which was abruptly terminated at the end of an hour by the discovery that "Baltimore" Ryan was fast asleep. Mr. Smith was vexed and said so.

"That's all right," soothed the man from Baltimore. "If it took you that long to tell about him, I guess his family came out of the Ark all right. I'm much obliged."

Ryan was mindful of the courtesies this time. He rewarded the Professor with ten dollars, appreciating the fact that a specialist was entitled to more consideration than a practitioner of the "Information Kid's" type.

Three days later the bookmaker sent for little "Izzy" Kirschberg.

"Ever been to Pleasanton, Kid?"

RIDERS UP!

"No, sir."

"Well, I'm shipping you and Baltasar there to-night. Here's a letter to old Doc' Kelly who'll be your boss for a while. You're to behave, understand? Also, you go to school. Can you write?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, do it, and send me your report cards. What do you scale now?"

"About ninety pounds, sir."

"H'm, let me see your hands."

Ryan studied the small well-shaped fingers and then looked down at the feet. They, too, were small.

"Well," he continued, "I guess that's all, Kid; one of these days I may try you out in the Baltimore colors,—you and the chestnut."

"You mean that, Mister?" asked the youngster. Into the small face crept the vision of an idealist; the dark eyes glowed with the hidden fervor that is peculiar to the people of the dispersion. He took a step forward and looked up earnestly at "Baltimore" Ryan.

"Mister," said Izzy Kirschberg, "you're the first guy that's ever treated me white. You're taking my tip on Baltasar, and you're staking me to school and to a job, and don't you think I'll ever forget it. I'm going to make good

STAR OF ISRAEL

for you, Mister—I'm going to . . . *make . . . good.*"

Before Ryan could divine his intention, "Izzy" impulsively seized his employer's hand, carried it to his lips, and scurried for the door.

"What the hell—" said the bookmaker. But the boy was gone.

By the end of the week, "Baltimore" Ryan had forgotten completely both Baltasar and Izzy Kirschberg.

That was a wonderful year for little Izzy Kirschberg and the chestnut son of the mighty Rock Gold; a year of quiet conditioning in the Arcadian air of the Livermore Valley which combines the glory of California with the charm of Old Kentuck', and lies but an hour's journey from the Bay of San Francisco.

They found there a race track never mentioned in the official form charts but known by horsemen from Canada to Mexico, and from which many a royal son and daughter of the turf have gone forth after the winter months ready to fight it out for the Throne of the Thoroughbred.

They found there a medley of the equine world such as neither boy nor horse had ever seen; cold-blooded horses from the Grand Circuit; hot-blooded talent from the realm of the runners;

RIDERS UP!

high-aceing trotters with elbow boots and their cousins—the daisy-cutters; aged campaigners and aristocratic weanlings that had yet to feel the pressure of the racing saddle which, fully rigged, weighs but a pound and a half.

But, best of all, little Izzy Kirschberg, a wind-blown weed from the New York ghetto, encountered at Pleasanton old Doc' Kelly, who was fat and bald and very wise; and the veterinarian introduced him to gray-headed Sandy McKee who had served his time in a British regiment that drank to "God, the King, and our horses!"

Since the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, old Doc' Kelly and Sandy McKee had been pals. Wherefore, since Izzy Kirschberg had reported to one of them, the other likewise joined in the education of "Baltimore" Ryan's protégé. During the long summer evenings, when the grizzled chums sat on the porch of the veterinarian's office, arguing on the eternal problems of equine nature and characteristics, Izzy sat on the lower step, silent and absorbed.

Gradually, to the boy's instinct and passion for horses, was added much information that was destined to prove useful. He learned that a horse is neither a coward, nor a bully, nor a fool, as many authorities proclaim, but a high-strung, intelligent animal that is prone to be swayed by

STAR OF ISRAEL

memory. When a horse runs back into a burning stable, it is not because he is fascinated by the flames, but he remembers that his stall has always been a place of security and comfort, and thither he turns in the hour of danger.

The boy discovered that, with the Arabs, a white horse stood for religious purity; a bay for speed and bottom, hence war and victory; a yellow or gray for Death; and that concerning the temperry chestnut—the ancients were accustomed to say: “Be slow to buy, my son, and still slower to sell if he has proved a good one.”

He learned that the “monkey-on-the-stick” crouch developed by Tod Sloan owed its success to the fact that it removed the pressure of the rider’s legs from the breathing apparatus of the horse and put the pressure on the ridge of the withers instead of the shoulders.

Similarly, the lad listened to long dissertations on that most marvelous of all equine formations, the foot of the thoroughbred, which beats a thousand-pound tattoo on a fast track with such force that the hoof of a draft horse would be shattered at the first impact. He heard Sandy McKee explain how human magnetism, transmitted over the reins from the hands of a rider to the sensitive mouth of his mount, answers the question of why a horse responds to one man and

RIDERS UP!

not another, and accounts for the fact that a thoroughbred is seldom gamer than the boy who is on him.

These and many other things impressed themselves very deeply on Izzy Kirschberg's mind. During school hours he learned what other children of his age are supposed to know. But in the early mornings and late in the afternoon, he exercised Baltasar on the mile track, keeping his little body low so that it offered no resistance to the wind and making another horse shield his own mount from heavy air currents until the time came to make his move.

Sandy McKee taught the youngster how to judge pace accurately, and day after day Izzy developed his natural talent in that direction until he knew within a fraction of a second what pace he was setting at every pole.

With it all he still found time to write letters,—queer little letters that he took first to his teacher to guard against any mistake in spelling or grammar; letters that found their way to an establishment in New York's emigrant cauldron where Papa Jacob and Mamma Rebecca retailed clothing in an effort to meet the wholesale demands of the junior Kirschbergs. It was an over-crowded business, wherefore Jacob Kirschberg viewed with joy Izzy's regular twelve dol-

STAR OF ISRAEL

lar remittances, and Mamma Rebecca showed the letters to all the neighbors and to Mannie Greenbaum, the tailor,—proclaiming that “Isadore a great rider of horses will become what everybody, y’understand, will be proud to know!”

Other letters, painfully accurate, reached Izzy’s employer and were read with mingled interest and amusement.

Rather late in life, “Baltimore” Ryan had awakened to the fact that he had two charming daughters, now at a marriageable age, and that the business in which he was best known was proving a handicap to their natural ambitions. For their sake he discontinued the practice of spinning little marbles at Fortuna’s shrine. Nor was the picturesque profession of the bookmaker open to him any longer, for pari-mutuel machines were replacing the old-time slate writers.

So the man with the two beautiful daughters elected to devote his talents and his fortune to the field of the owner and breeder who follows the turf as a legitimate business and gets his greatest joy in seeing his colors flash to the front when the field is swinging into the stretch. At public auction he secured the pick of a well-known stable, and set himself to make the Baltimore colors—silver stars on a field of scarlet—equal to the highest traditions of the sport.

RIDERS UP!

Spring came and brought a letter from Izzy Kirschberg.

Aren't you ever go to send for us, Mr. Ryan? I've been a good boy and Baltasar is a big horse now. Yesterday I had him swinging a mile in 1:41 and the track is two seconds slow. Doc' says the horse never grew as a three year old, but he sure has spread in the last two months. You ain't forgotten what you said about giving us both a chance some day, have you? Everybody's fine to me here, but I'm just rarin' to go. Your little friend.

ISIDORE KIRSCHBERG.

P. S. Honest, Mr. Ryan, we're ready to win at the first asking. I can still do 95 pounds. *Please* send for us.

Ryan read this letter twice and then dispatched the following telegram to the Pleasanton veterinarian:

"Boy reports Baltasar working forty-one slow track. That right."

To which old Doc' Kelly wired back:

"Yes and fighting for his head."

Ten days later a diminutive and very happy youngster showed up at the Lexington track in Kentucky leading a chestnut horse of unusual size and bone and splendid balance.

STAR OF ISRAEL

Izzy Kirschberg had expected to find "Baltimore" Ryan at the track, but the former book-maker was in New York preparing for a campaign on the Eastern tracks. In Ryan's place was "Matty" Wolff in charge of the southern string, and "Matty," while he knew a whole lot about horseflesh, knew nothing concerning Izzy Kirschberg and cared less.

To the boy's eager—"When are we going to start, Mister Wolff," the trainer replied:

"Where do you get that 'we' stuff? I got more boys now than I know what to do with. Go on over there with the 'swipes' and if I want you, I'll tell you about it."

The boy watched a groom lead Baltasar away, then he turned slowly in the direction of the stables, his little mind striving to readjust itself to this unexpected angle of the game. In the track restaurant he met "Chick" Neil, Tommy Castro, "Tongo" Magee and other boys who had made life miserable for him in the old days at Tia Juana. Neil was the first to spot the newcomer.

"Well, look what blew in from Jerusalem!" he cried, "learned how to dance yet, Kid?"

"No," said Izzy.

"Say 'No, *sir*,' when you're talking to white people," corrected the older boy.

"No, *sir*."

RIDERS UP!

"That's right. Your education's been neglected, but don't worry, we'll teach you a few things if you stick around here."

"You let me alone," flared Izzy, "I'm working for Mister Ryan."

"Oh, you are? Well, you'll wish you weren't before I get through with you. I happen to be first string jock for Ryan myself, so don't get too ambitious, understand?"

Izzy Kirschberg understood perfectly. He had seen too many apprentice boys "broken" not to know that the realm of the regular riders constitutes a charmed circle into which a newcomer ventures at his peril. The same struggle that finds expression on the stage, in the business world or in the drawing rooms of the "400," is a characteristic of that mysterious sphere wherein immature youth, hailed by the multitude and guarded by detectives, competes for fame and fortune.

What happened was only what might be expected. Baltasar was sent to the post in a mile event with Neil up, and the boy hustled his mount out in front setting entirely too fast a pace for a horse that likes to come from behind. Baltasar finished fourth, and Izzy was broken-hearted. Reckless of consequences, he turned on "Chick" Neil in the jockey room after the race.

"You had no business running him into the

STAR OF ISRAEL

ground like that," he flamed, "the horse would have won if you'd laid off the pace. I could have told you he wasn't a front runner if you'd asked me!"

The older boy put his open hand against Izzy's face and thrust the youngster violently against the wall. "Don't you try to tell me how to ride," he stormed, "keep your beak out of my business or I'll break every bone in your body. I say the horse quit,—he quit just like a certain little rat I know is going to quit."

"He didn't quit!"

"Chick" Neil needed only the excuse. His fist shot out and the little apprentice crumpled up on the floor. "Boots" Clifford, in charge of the jockey room, interfered hastily.

"Cut that stuff out," he admonished, "or I'll turn you in."

"Oh, I guess you won't," said Neil, "not unless you want the stewards to know who you were talking with Tuesday night."

The retort had its effect. "Boots" Clifford turned his attention to the boy on the floor and prodded the figure with the toe of his shoe.

"Quit sniffing and get up," he ordered. "I heard you call 'Chick' a liar. After this, don't start anything you can't finish."

A week later the boy got his first mount in

RIDERS UP!

a seven furlong selling race. He had the leg up on Colonel Burke, an aged gelding, and he managed to get off well. At the five-eighths pole, he moved up on the outside, abreast of the two leaders, Chadbourne on Water Queen, and Chick Neil on Bombardier. The latter had the rail position.

As the three horses made the turn, Neil bore deliberately to the right, crowding the second horse into Baltasar. Izzy Kirschberg shrilled a warning, but the boy next to him was helpless. In another second the chestnut fell, throwing his rider and bringing down another horse that had been following close behind. Baltasar escaped injury, Izzy emerged with many bruises and a fractured rib; the second boy suffered a broken collar-bone, and "Chick" Neil was set down for two weeks for rough riding.

The incident didn't make the little apprentice any more popular with his trainer and it made "Baltimore" Ryan's first string jockey all the more vindictive. Not unnaturally, the other youngsters followed the attitude of one who was a recognized star.

Not too much blame should be put upon "Chick" Neil. Like many another wizard of the whip and spurs, he had been taken from an orphanage at a tender age and hurled bodily into

STAR OF ISRAEL

an environment where those who cannot fight their way to the top are speedily trampled to the bottom. He was but applying lessons that he had learned through bitter experience. The wonder is that for every boy of "Chick" Neil's type there are a dozen like little Tad Shafer who came pattering across the dormitory floor one night when he heard Izzy sobbing in his bed.

"What's the matter, Kid?" he whispered.

"N-nothing," stuttered the Israelite, "it's only my bad r-rib. 'Chick' hit me there again to-day. He's trying to make me quit."

"The big bum," said Tad, "he ought to lay off. You ain't a bad little Jew at all. I'll get some adhesive tape in the morning and show you how to put it on. One of these days you and me will jump that guy together—you climb on his back and I'll wallop him; is it a go?"

"Thanks," said Izzy, and followed it up with such protestations of gratitude and esteem, that Tad retreated in some confusion.

"Baltimore" Ryan, coming down from New York for the Closing Day Handicap at Latonia, saw Baltasar, with Neil again in the saddle beaten a head on the post by the favorite in a terrific drive over a heavy track. The big chestnut was ridden out hard at the end and finished under punishment.

RIDERS UP!

Ryan looked up from his program at the conclusion of the last race to find Izzy Kirschberg tugging at his sleeve.

"Why, hello, Kid," he cried, "where you been keeping yourself?"

"You ought to know, Mister," the boy reminded, "I been right here waiting for you. Me and Baltasar ain't been able to hook up."

"Well, Matty is boss down here," said Ryan, "that was a tough race to lose."

"Tough race is right, Mister," the boy agreed; "old Doc' Kelly told me that after a horse is ridden out like that he either goes back or he improves,—that's what I want to see you about."

The owner looked puzzled.

"It's the Brooklyn Handicap at Aqueduct," pleaded Izzy—"give us a chance, will you, Mister Ryan? Let me and Baltasar go to the post; I ain't been working him for a year without knowing how to handle him. It won't cost you anything and it means an awful lot to me. Go on, Mister, *please!*"

Ryan looked down at the eager little face and checked the jest that suggested itself.

"Not this time, Izzy," he explained gently. "You're picking the most popular classic in America, and I hope I've got that race sewed up in my vest pocket. I can't afford to take chances."

STAR OF ISRAEL

Neil will ride Fireball and I bought and groomed the horse specially for that race. It's Fireball to win, and a busted stable if he don't."

The boy studied the ground a moment and then looked up again. It's a mile and a quarter, Mister, and that's Baltasar's distance. Couldn't you make it a stable entry and let both of us start? I'd get the apprentice allowance and we'd be in light. I can ride, Mister—don't let nobody tell you I can't. I been studying every boy on the track and there ain't any of them that hasn't taught me something. Mister, I want to show them that a Jew isn't a quitter, and I want to make good for you like I promised."

The youngster paused and drew a deep breath.

Ryan's mind went back to his conversation with the "Information Kid" in the billiard room at San Diego, and to those queer pedigree charts concerning which "the little Professor" had waxed so enthusiastic. After all, a second string horse had been known to prove of value in a big race. There would be three or four stables with more than one entry, and in a large field Baltasar might kill off some of the early speed and serve as a pace-setter for Fireball. Ryan patted Izzy Kirschberg on the head.

"I'll think it over," he promised. "Fortunately

RIDERS UP!

I entered the whole stable in the spring. We'll see what Matty has to say about it. Have the kids taught you how to dance yet?"

"No, sir."

"And you haven't changed your name?"

"No, sir."

"What the devil are you looking at me like that for?"

The youngster shook his head, but in his dark eyes was the hidden fire of the centuries and in his voice was the prophetic tone of the dreamer:

"I'm going to make good for you, Mister."

Ryan laughed good-naturedly. "All right, Kid! —run along now and I'll see about your transportation."

Thus it happened that little Isidore Kirschberg went on to New York with Baltasar to compete in the most aristocratic event on the calendar of the American turf. Nor did he ever know that Matty Wolff, agreeing readily to a stable entry, threw up his hands at the idea of a raw apprentice rider, and only an eleventh hour accident to "Gene" Daly, second-string jockey, upset the cards and surrendered Baltasar's destiny to the hands that the horse knew best of all. Arriving in New York, the boy flew to the east side as straight as a homing pigeon.

If ever there was a proud and happy child of

STAR OF ISRAEL

the Ghetto it was the boy who flung himself into the arms of Mamma and Papa Kirschberg, and who hugged his brothers and sisters, and shook hands with all the admiring neighbors, and told over and over again the story of his wanderings, saying never a word of the dark chapters,—but painting in golden tones—the greatness of “Baltimore” Ryan and the miracle that had come to him—Isadore Kirschberg.

In came Rabbi Vorrath who lived next door; in came Mannie Greenbaum, the tailor, and Mose Kruvotsky and Mrs. Kruvotsky, and the Sonnenscheins.

“You see, Mamma,” explained Izzy, straddling a chair and tilting forward to illustrate Baltasar, “I sit way up like this, y’understand, and I hold the reins so—and I watch all the other boys, and just when they are going to make their move—*Schma!* I try to beat them! See!”

From the inner pocket of his jacket, he produced the scarlet and silver racing cap, pressed it on his head—and, leaning well forward on the chair, bounced up and down.

He concluded his performance and, looking up for approval, saw his mother’s wide eyes fastened on the gorgeous cap.

“Oi,” exclaimed Mrs. Kirschberg, “a silk cap he has, and see, everybody—there is on it *Mogen*

RIDERS UP!

Dovid; he has not forgotten—*Oi, mein kind-leben!*”

The little group pressed forward, and Rabbi Vorrath took the cap in his hands.

“*Emes, emes!*” he exclaimed, “verily it is true—the boy wears the shield of David.”

Izzy’s wondering eyes went again to the gorgeous cap and there, looking up at him, from a background of scarlet, was the symbol of Judah,—the hope of her children,—the six-pointed star of Israel!

Into the boy’s eyes danced the high-lights. His lips quivered.

“It is the sign,” he said, “you are all my people and it is for you that I want to win. Come to the track if you can and I will do my best.”

Rabbi Vorrath stroked his beard and looked about him. One after another of the little group nodded and came forward to shake the boy’s hand. He understood. . . .

In all the world there is nothing quite like the scene at post time in the Brooklyn Handicap, twelve kings and queens of the turf, sidling up to a three inch ribbon under the concentrated gaze of a hundred thousand eyes; each boy trying to outmaneuver the others,—the heavyweights anxious to be off; the lightweights eager to prolong the wait; the assistant starters dart-

STAR OF ISRAEL

ing into the tangle, swearing, lashing out with the whips; the starter standing there with hand on the trigger—pleading, cajoling, threatening:

“Bring that horse up on the outside . . . turn him around . . . Johnson, if you break through again, I’ll put you on the ground for two weeks. . . . Don’t talk back to me . . . Come over here with that chestnut . . . Randall—you’ll get left! . . . move over, number five. Now, then—swing ’em together, swing— . . . No—no, you don’t . . . get back and try it over . . . come up easy . . . *e-a-s-y*. . . . *Go!*”

Tad Schafer on Sierra Madre, anticipating the command, drove his mount at the barrier, ducked as it flashed up, and was away two lengths in the lead, hugging the rail. Behind him thundered the pack, every boy fighting for position and watching the pace.

Only the official caller could have determined who broke second and he gave it to Baltasar, with Arc Light third and Old Alliance fourth. The others were well bunched. Before they had reached the first quarter, Izzy Kirschberg took his horse off the pace and brought him back into the second division. As he did so, Fireball nosed alongside and then drew clear. “Chick” Neil, off badly, was hustling the horse up to the front.

RIDERS UP!

Izzy shouted a warning. Even in the midst of the greatest excitement he had ever known, he had time to realize that Fireball, heavily played favorite, was being rushed up before he had been steadied in his stride. The little apprentice remembered his instructions: "Go out in front and stay there as long as you can." But he knew that to every jockey is given the right to exercise his judgment if the situation is changed by unforeseen circumstances. Sierra Madre was already killing off all the early foot; Fireball was expending strength that he should have held in reserve. Izzy Kirschberg steadied Baltasar and dropped him back into seventh position.

The field spread out in the back stretch, the Harwood entry and Thistle Dawn assuming command, followed by three horses running abreast. Just before the turn, Izzy elected to make his move, and then he found the outside of the track blocked by Old Alliance who was hanging on gamely. He turned the chestnut's nose to the left and, risking a pocket, moved in between the two horses in front of him, giving Baltasar his head.

At Izzy's left was Tad Shafer on the tiring Sierra Madre. Tad looked across and saw that the boy abreast of him was veering in to shut off the chestnut; he looked back and noted that Balta-

STAR OF ISRAEL

sar was running strong and he caught the pleading look in the eyes of Izzy Kirschberg.

With scarcely a moment's hesitation, game little Tad pulled his own horse into the fence, one small boot crunching against the top rail.

"G'on through, kid," he yelled, "go get 'em, Izzy! *Take the outside!*"

The boots of the three boys brushed as "Baltimore" Ryan's apprentice squeezed through the opening and emerged from the ruck. In a half-dozen jumps he was on the crown of the track and drawing alongside Fireball, the latter pounding heavily along in sixth place.

"Chick" Neil caught the significance of the big horse nosing up to Fireball's saddle-girths.

"Keep out of my way, you little rat," he snarled,—*"you cut me off and I'll kill you!"*

Baltasar continued to forge ahead until the two scarlet blouses with the silver stars were whipping in the wind on a parallel line.

"I can't help it," panted Izzy, "you've shot your bolt; you're through . . . I'm going out in front!"

The hot blood surged into the other boy's head. He set aside his own future, his employer's interests, and the obvious fact that Baltasar was coupled with Fireball in the betting. He realized only that he had blundered; that his own mount

RIDERS UP!

was caving; and that a despised stable boy was taunting him.

"Try to show me up, will you?" he shrilled. "Take *that*, and get out of my way!"

Full across the face, a whip struck Izzy Kirschberg, searing the flesh from scalp to chin. The boy reeled, recovered, reeled again—and clung dizzily. Baltasar faltered and dropped back.

Ninety-nine boys out of a hundred would have given up, but in the veins of the lad on the great chestnut flowed the blood of a race which has survived fire and sword through the centuries, and has taught its children to struggle on though despair be their birthright.

Izzy Kirschberg remembered what old Doc' Kelly and Sandy McKee had told him about the reaction of a thoroughbred to its rider. By sheer will power he stifled his agony, pressed his thighs more firmly against the withers, and telegraphed a message of assurance along the reins. Through cracked lips, he clucked to Baltasar, and the chestnut lunged forward, his stride lengthening.

Horse and boy made the turn without losing a foot of ground and straightened away for the stretch run that is the longest of any track in America. They picked up the fifth horse, then

STAR OF ISRAEL

two more running abreast, then another. The boy knew there was one more, and desperately he laid his face down against Baltasar's steaming neck and went to work. Dizzy with vertigo he made out a shadow ahead on the left and knew that he was gaining on it.

Then the swollen ridge on his face burst and the red mist crept into his eyes and little Izzy Kirschberg rode on to the roaring stands; on to his own people shrieking his name; on to the little clubhouse where a big man, watching through field glasses, kept his face expressionless but bit clean through his cigar.

The vocal tempest reached its climax in a mighty blast at the wire and then receded. The boy pressed on mechanically but the horse understood, and dropping into a blown canter, eventually turned, and of his own accord, trotted back to the groom that was running toward him.

The reaction came and the little apprentice swayed in the saddle, aware that he was approaching the judges' stand, and terribly afraid that he had failed. He cleared his eyes of blood and dust and held up his whip for permission to dismount. Dark forms engulfed him. He heard the shouting thousands, but still he waited.

"Hell and seven hundred dollars!" boomed a

RIDERS UP!

voice in his ears, "you wonderful kid—come down off that horse!"

And Izzy came—pitching headfirst into the arms of "Baltimore" Ryan. He straightened up, clinging to his employer.

"Did I make good, Mister?—I couldn't see. Did I win?"

Ryan took the boy in his arms. "By two lengths, son," he assured, "and going away! For the love of God tell me who hit you—tell me his name!"

Izzy shook his head. Still carrying the boy in his arms, Ryan headed for the judges' stand. But before he could get to the steps, a man leaned out the window and shouted:

"Bring Neil up here—get hold of that boy!" And Ryan knew from the tone of the voice that his first string jockey would never again wear silk.

He hugged Izzy Kirschberg and hoisted the boy, facing the stands. The clamor redoubled.

"Hear that music, son? Drink it in, boy, it's all for you—and from now on, you'll hear it often!"

The boy smiled happily for high above the thunder of the stands, his quick ear caught the high-pitched chant of a little group of frenzied men and women, who had never been to a track

STAR OF ISRAEL

before—standing high up in the gallery and crying over and again:

“Gott fun Avrohom, Yitzchok un Yakov!”
God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! “Heidad,
Mogen Dovid!” *Hail, Star of Israel!*

IV. WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME

*Lil' jay street in a lil' hick town;
Lil' ol' house 'most tumblin' down;
Lil' gray mother close by the gate
Looks and listens—she'll always wait—
Pretty long time since he started to roam—
Some day Johnny'll come marchin' home!*

—HEARTS AND HOOFBEATS.

IT was Get-Away Day at Tijuana, and the Information Kid was going home.

It wasn't the first time the Kid had planned that very thing. The children of the racetrack are always going home—some day. It is the pet delusion of those who follow the trail of the thoroughbred through the channels of chance.

The rest of the world measures hope and desire by the ship whose sails loom on the eternal horizon, but the clan of the bang-tail look always to the day when, sure as Fate, some sweating, hooded, bandaged galloper will swing around the far turn, safely in the lead, carrying life's ultimate objective right on his nose! When that great day comes, every knight of the betting ring

JOHNNY COMES HOME

is going home with bells on to knock the old town dead.

The Information Kid turned into the long avenue of barns and headed for the Watercress stable. His slim figure was resplendent in a new checkered suit, set off with a knitted tie of plutocratic purple from which a diamond winked merrily. The early morning sunshine caressed his frame; a joyous heart pumped fresh young blood through every vein; and an inside pocket of his coat bulged with twenty-five hundred dollars in currency, the largest bank-roll the Kid had ever amassed in his twenty-four years of existence.

"Sweet baby," he murmured, patting the roll of greenbacks, "don't let go of daddy's hand. This is the day we just sit back and watch the wolves eat Grandma!"

The advice was entirely superfluous, for the Kid had not the slightest intention of permitting the bundle of currency to become separated from the pocket that was sealed by safety-pins. The Kid was going home while the going was good. Pure curiosity led him to the track that morning; habit steered him to the last stall in the Watercress barn where his quick ears caught the voice of Snowball, lilting a melody while he wiped off Sandtown, steaming from a brisk workout.

The Information Kid draped himself over the

RIDERS UP!

half-door, and gravely considered the bay gelding. The colored swipe nodded to him, and then continued his song:

*De Camptown ladies sing dis song,
Doodah! Doodah!
De Camptown race track's five miles long,
O Doodah Day!
I come down heah wif my hat caved in,
I'm goin' back home wif a pocketful of tin,
O Doodah Day!*

"Mawnin', Kid, ya'll want a good thing to-day?"

"Ye-ah, but not *that* thing."

Snowball grunted indignantly, and then resumed his vocal efforts:

*De long tail filly and de big black horse,
Doodah! Doodah!
They fly de track and dey both cut across,
O Doodah Day!
De black horse stickin' in a big mud hole,
Can't touch de bottom wif a ten-foot pole,
O Doodah Day!*

He whirled suddenly on the Kid:

"Worked down the back stretch this mawnin', five furlongs in 1.01 2-5. Boy, dis old bird am in!"

"Ye-ah, he's in the morgue—that's where he

JOHNNY COMES HOME

is! Who's going to be the 'Casey Jones'?"

"Jockey Williams goin' ride him—dat's whol Ninety-five pounds up, and they've got de money placed from heah to de North Pole. Kid, dis am a special soft spot."

The Information Kid grinned cheerfully.

"You give me that old whisper on opening day, remember? And I gave Johnny Walker as my special. Say, the way that dog ran you'd think he was swimmin' in glue!"

"Dat was de boy what spilled de beans," protested Snowball. "Dis time y'all goin' see Sandtown come home on the chin strap."

"And I'm goin' home on the cushions," concluded the Kid. "Snowball, you have my best regards."

He vanished toward the Carroll stables. After him rolled a confident chorus, as Snowball vigorously massaged Sandtown:

Gwine ter run all night!

Gwine ter run all day!

I bets my money on de bob-tailed nag,

Somebody bet on de bay!

At a row of stalls fringing the eastern end of the track, the Kid encountered "Doggie" Brown, one of the whisper low gentry with whom he occasionally exchanged information. Doggie

RIDERS UP!

dragged him into the privacy of a tanbark corridor. There was no one within hearing distance, much less in sight, but the hustler always spoke as though he was surrounded by dictaphones.

"Peaches and cream," he whispered, "here's something too good to be true——"

"Well, write it out if you can't talk," advised the Kid, "I'm kind of deaf this morning."

Thus encouraged, Doggie raised his voice very slightly:

"Old man Tassel is going to shoot with Johnny Walker in the last race, and the better the price the faster he'll run——"

"What about Sandtown?"

"Not a chance. Johnny's going to be hopped up so he can run over the moon if necessary; it's going to be the fattest coup pulled off in years. Now, don't tell your own mother!"

Once more the Kid grinned. "Doggie," he adjured, "you're too young to be around this track to-day. If they put a powder under old Johnny Walker's tongue, he'll run himself to death in the first quarter, and old man Tassel will be pinched for obstructing the traffic. But you have my best regards, and may your conscience guide you!"

"Go take a running jump at yourself," advised Doggie—"and don't blame me if this thing hops

JOHNNY COMES HOME

down in front at a hundred to one, understand? Don't say I didn't tell you!"

The Information Kid nodded good-naturedly and ambled off. Once beyond the range of Doggie Brown's vision, he doubled back and made his way to Johnny Walker's stall. A chunky black gelding lifted his head from the feed-trough and stared at him.

The Kid addressed the animal confidentially:

"Johnny," he commented, "you carry your head too high, you're a little too fleshy; you've got ring-bones and sore shoulders, and your pedigree shows an unbroken line of hounds; outside of that you're all right!"

Around the corner of the barn came "Froggie" Miller, an apprentice rider for "Dixie" Mason. Froggie was a hunchback, but he had good hands and a firm seat, and could strip at seventy-five pounds. The Information Kid liked the boy.

"'Lo, Frog," he called, "I hear you're going to be in the cab on Captain Ace in the last event—is he ready for the question?"

Froggie looked up at him out of frank blue eyes.

"I think he'll win, Kid. Mr. Mason has promised to cut the purse with me if we come down in front, and it won't be my fault if we don't. I got

RIDERS UP!

permission to go home for a month, so I'm riding for dough to-day."

The Kid nodded kindly. "Good luck! Take him out in front, you've got a chance. If you lay back with him, some kid is liable to ride you over the rail; everybody's shooting to-day."

"I'll be careful," promised Froggie.

The Information Kid proceeded on his personally conducted tour. The further he went, the more information he collected, a policy which accounted for his pseudonym. But the Kid had cut his wisdom teeth early in life. He discounted seventy-five per cent of all stable gossip, and interpreted the balance after a manner that was strictly his own. When it came to Get-Away Day, the percentage of information which he trusted was absolutely nil. The final day at any track finds the fodder low in the feed-troughs, and every unscrupulous owner and trainer anxious to earn get-away money, by fair means or Mexican. This time, the Kid sensed that there was more dynamite in the air than usual. At the north exit, he came to a sensible conclusion.

"This is no place for an innocent boy, *believe me!* Any guy who tries to pick 'em to-day will go home without even the key to the front door. I think I hear my mother calling me; ye-ah, I'm

JOHNNY COMES HOME

sure of it! Bye-bye, you old mud hole—you have my best regards."

He waved an airy farewell at the green and white pavilion, patted his bulging pocket reassuringly, and sprinted for the auto stage that was leaving for San Diego.

"Here's the only wise stunt I ever pulled in my life," he muttered, "the Spaniard that takes my roll away from me to-day will have to run faster than Man o' War. Once let me get on the old choo-choo, and I'll be safe from everybody except the porter. Yea, bol!"

He alighted at the San Diego plaza in the heart of the city, hesitated, and then sauntered across to the curb that flanked the Grant Hotel where a perambulating news wagon represented the stock in trade of old "General Jeff," who was neither a general, nor was his real name Jeff. He was merely a faded old man of unknown identity with scrubby whiskers, a fondness for badges, and a weakness of vision that imposed upon customers the obligation of honesty. The title of General Jeff was bestowed for purely humorous reasons by a clientele which purchased from him printed selections on the day's races at Tijuana. These tips were enclosed in envelopes which were emblazoned with the labels: "Ex-Jockey Mason's Code," "Master Handicapper's Tips," "Rail-

RIDERS UP!

bird's Triple X Special." The selections were all different, but they emanated from the same author. What the Information Kid didn't guess under one name, he picked under another—and thus was usually in a position to advertise winners. The Kid defended the practice this way:

"Some men favor cinch bets, others like to play commission nags, and there's always the birds who want to take a chance with the long shots. So I pick 'em three ways, give the boys their choice, and charge 'em only two bucks; what could be fairer? They have my best regards and may their conscience guide them!"

The Information Kid and General Jeff understood each other from long association. The Kid picked 'em, or tried to, and the old newsdealer with the bad eyes peddled to a gullible public the threefold product of the Kid's wisdom.

They exchanged greetings and then General Jeff, with a flush on his withered cheeks, and his voice childishly exultant, broke the great news. The Kid listened open-mouthed, until the General concluded with a quivering—"So, you see, Kid, I'm fixed for life!"

"Why, you old son-of-a-gun, put it there!"

"And I'm to have a bureau, and they change the sheets twice a week, and serve ice cream on Sunday!"

JOHNNY COMES HOME

"Well, what do you know!"

"Ain't you never seen the place, Kid? It's up there on the cliffs. The grounds cover half a block—and there's all kinds of flowers. Of course I can't see 'em very good, but I can *smell* 'em. Miramar Home they call it, and I got a room picked out on the *top* floor!"

The Information Kid was visibly impressed. To put it more accurately, he was amazed. To think of General Jeff saving enough money to buy himself a life home—actually retiring on velvet! Well, you never can figure those old birds. Just when you expect them to hit you for the price of the next meal, they pull something like that!

"Got to hand it to you, old pal," admitted the Kid. "You slipped one over that time; never thought you had any kind of a sack at all. But there isn't any one any gladder than me to see old Jeff hitched to a feed-trough for the rest of his life. Here's the last day's pickings, and you're welcome to whatever they bring in—I'm blowin'."

General Jeff fingered the package which the Kid handed over, deftly measured the envelopes, parted them according to size, and tucked them into the proper compartments on the shelf of his wagon.

"Much obliged," he acknowledged. "Yes, sir, after to-day old Jeff won't have to worry about

RIDERS UP!

the future; no more hustlin' papers in the rain; no more peddlin' tips—just going to live like a gentleman. You following the bunch to Reno, Kid?"

"No, Jeff, I'm off the ponies for a while; I'm going home."

"Home?"

"Ye-ah, home—sounds funny, don't it? I been promising my old lady every year that I'd do it. Hit the books for a wad this week and got myself some glad rags. I'll knock the old folks silly!"

General Jeff ran his hands over the new wardrobe and peered into the Kid's cleanly shaven face.

"Good on you, young man!" he enthused.

"When you going?"

"To-night."

"To-night, eh? The General's head wagged approvingly. "If I was you, Kid—I'd never buck the game any more. I'd never go near a track again if I was you. I'm through with the game after just this one time."

"What one time?"

"I'm coming to that," said Jeff plaintively. "I've got a favor to ask, Kid. Maybe you won't understand, but it's like this. I was born and brought up within smelling distance of stables, but I ain't been to a track in years. What's the

JOHNNY COMES HOME

use? I can't see the numbers, or nothin'. Now I'm going where all I'll have to do is just sit around and talk. There's a lot of horsemen up at Miramar Home, Kid—men like Montana Pete Smith and Jerky Dugan, and Mose Griggs. They went there right from the track, and they got a lot to talk about. Seems like I won't fit in, unless I been at the track, too—so's I can have my say. I want to retire right from the track."

"Right from the track?" The Kid was puzzled.

"That's it," confirmed Jeff. "Will you take me along with you this afternoon, and call off the last race? You got good eyes, and mine are about gone, but by you describing everything just as it happens I can *see*, understand? Will you do that, Kid?"

The youth in the checked suit frowned meditatively. It was a hunch that caused him to turn his back on Tijuana that morning, and the Kid was a firm believer in hunches. Still, no one could make him risk his money once he had determined against such a thing, and the Limited did not leave until dark. Further, the Information Kid, according to the standards of the turf, was a pretty good sport. He glanced again at the old man's pleading expression.

RIDERS UP!

"Why, sure, Jeff," he agreed, "I'll be glad to go along with you. I'll call every race on the card."

"No, just the last, Kid, that's all; I just want to *see* old Johnny Walker come marching home all by himself at a hundred to one!"

The Kid clapped a hand to his forehead.

"Help! Murder! Police!" he croaked. "Jeff, are you still following that old hound? How many times do I have to tell you that he's *dead*? The undertaker's got him embalmed, and it's a sin against nature to send him to the post."

The General plucked nervously at his whiskers.

"He beat Arbor Hill at New Orleans. You look it up."

The Information Kid controlled himself with an effort.

"Listen, Jeff," he appealed: "I'll take you out to the track and give you an earful, but forget Johnny Walker. I know all about the race you're thinking of—I was *there*. The boy on Arbor Hill was rolling a cigarette in one hand, and pulling his horse with the other. Why, every jock in the race had a ticket on Johnny Walker that day, and they just naturally *shooed* him down to the pay off station. Seven furlongs in 1:32! If that ain't a funeral march, I'm the queen of Egypt."

JOHNNY COMES HOME

General Jeff shook his head with the obstinacy of an old man clinging to a pet obsession.

"You and me been fighting a long time about that horse, Kid—a long time—me always playing him, and you always telling me not to. You've been right all along, but this is where I show you that they can't fool old Jeff all the time. Johnny Walker's going to be *hot* this afternoon—hot and a hundred to one!"

"Let him run, Jeff! You're not going to bet a nickel if I take you there, understand? Not one nickel! We go everywhere else, but no betting ring."

"All right," agreed the General, "I won't bet anything all afternoon, but remember I'm telling you what I know, Kid. Old Johnny's going to swing around that turn at the head of the field. Yes, sir, you're going to call it off to me like this:

"Into . . . the . . . stretch—*Johnny Walker by two lengths!*"

The Kid laughed good-naturedly.

"All right, Jeff," he soothed, "have your own way. Lock the old cart up and we'll head for church."

So the Information Kid, a wandering urchin from a little hick town, and old General Jeff, a beribboned derelict from nowhere, visited the

RIDERS UP!

Tijuana racetrack that afternoon, the former disregarding a hunch, and the latter obeying one.

Now there are two kinds of hunches among gamblers. One is prompted purely by superstition and may be safely ignored by wise men. The other arises from a strong intuitive *impression* that a certain thing will happen, and this second variety of hunch is not infrequently a mirror displayed by the hand-maiden of Destiny.

But the information Kid saw no reason for uneasiness. His inside coat pocket was securely fastened; his shrewd gray eyes were wide open; and he knew that by nightfall he would be backtracking on the homeward trail.

"Fat chance anybody's got to sic' me on to a good thing," he assured himself. "President of the Nickel-Nursers' Protective Association—that's me to-day!"

They boarded an automobile stage, and were soon whizzing along the sixteen mile highway that connects San Diego with the Mexican frontier. The Information Kid had made this trip a hundred times or more, nearly always with a dog-eared dope book on his knees, and his faculties concentrated on the task of translating the overnight entries into terms of past performances and probable results. Now he leaned back with an easy mind, and permitted his eyes to dwell

JOHNNY COMES HOME

upon the unfolding landscape. He experienced much the same sensation as a megaphone manipulator in a sightseeing bus, for, in all truth, this was a personally conducted excursion with old General Jeff as the party of the second part. Realizing this, the Kid promptly made his début as a spieler, nudging his companion's arm:

"Swell scenery, Jeff—all this green stuff on either side is vegetables—there's miles of it. Off toward the hills there's some orchards—lemons and oranges, green and yellow—and the ground's a kind of chocolate. By golly, Jeff, come to think of it, you can pick out the colors of every stable by just looking around. Yep, there's the Yosemite green and gold, and this bus is cherry—old man Jackson's brand—and the hills are a kind of purple——"

"Maybe they're lavender," the General suggested. "Lavender is Billy Tassel's silk, ain't it? The boy on Johnny Walker will be sporting lavender—you want to keep your eyes on that, Kid. Are the hills big?"

"Ye-ah, mountains; Mexican range, I guess."

"Higher than anything else around here?"

"Sure."

The General sighed contentedly.

"That means Johnny Walker's going to finish on top."

RIDERS UP!

The Kid could have pointed out that the purple-topped peaks in the distance formed also the *last* entry in the color scheme, but he held his peace.

They swished through Chula Vista, San Ysidro and the clump of buildings that represented Tijuana, the last settlement which labored under the restraining influence of American law. Across the border lay Tijuana, "Aunt Jane's" muddy and disreputable half-sister—a splatter of frame and 'dobe structures where American gamblers industriously entertained visitors and relieved them of excess wealth. The house percentage at Tijuana is necessarily large, because the authorities of the district have decreed that the army must be equipped with red pantaloons and shoes, so back of the town there is a *cárcel* where . . . but no matter!

The stage swung across the line, and paused long enough for a gentlemanly uniformed bandit to exact the customary passport fee.

"Five thousand passports a day in a 128-day meeting," commented the Kid, as he parted with his dollar—"I'll tell the cock-eyed world that's a Mexican percentage. *Hombre*, you have my best regards, and good-BYE!"

"Adios, amigo!" grinned the other.

The stage lurched ahead in a figure S, and then

JOHNNY COMES HOME

swung off to the left toward the green and white buildings quivering in the noon-day heat. The road was choked with pleasure cars. Long lines of blanketed horses were moving toward railroad sidings, where strings of box cars awaited them. Everything was colorful confusion. For this was Get-Away-Day—the parting performance by the bangtails—Tijuana's last call to the feed-trough—the day when every trainer has something up his sleeve in addition to his arm, and when the faithful whisper to one another in brotherly confidence:

“Remember, now—this dog will tiptoe from wire to wire. All you have to do is lay your money down and then line up at the counter. Go get yours, man, *go get it!*”

Inside the gates, the Information Kid took firm hold of the General's arm.

“This way,” he directed, heading toward the grandstand. “We can get an eyeful from upstairs, and I don't want to be within hailing distance of the common enemy. Here's one time when I don't want to fall into no fishpond and get hooked.”

“That's right,” Jeff agreed, “all we want to do is watch Johnny Walker come around that turn. I just want to *see* old Johnny come marching home——”

RIDERS UP!

The Kid grunted. "All I care about is seeing that nobody puts the old oofy-goof on my twenty-five hundred berries."

They skirted the betting ring and made for the staircase, but the Kid's familiar figure was recognized by half a dozen of his patrons. Bryce Deckleman, who ran a drugstore in San Diego, blocked their passage. In one hand he held "Jockey Mason's" selections.

"Who do you like in the third race, Kid?" he questioned. "I—I——"

"You have the answer in your lily white mitt," snapped the Kid. "Go 'way from me!"

Half-way up the stairs, Noisy Ned, a free-lance hustler, overtook them and buttonholed the General's guide.

"What d'ye hear, Kid? What d'ye hear?"

The Kid freed himself none too gently. "I don't hear nothing but 'Home, Sweet Home.' Bust away! Bust away!"

Noisy Ned's eyes narrowed. He suspected the Kid was holding out on him.

"If you knew who just gave me an earful," he tempted, "you'd be following me around with candy. This sleeper will be a hundred——"

"Say, if I follow you around it will be with a gat. Ain't your ears clean this afternoon, or how come? Beat it, I tell you, *beat it!*"

JOHNNY COMES HOME

The General clutched his friend's arms, and whispered:

"He meant Johnny Walker. He said a hundred to one. I told you I could pick 'em!"

The Kid grinned. "Ye-ah, Jeff—this is your day, sure enough. A guy can always pick 'em when he ain't betting."

The pair edged their way along the first row of benches in the grandstand until they came to the east railing, where no one could obstruct the view. Then the Kid left his companion for a moment. When he returned, he had a pair of field glasses.

"Got to do the thing up right if I'm going to call 'em," he explained. "Want to try to pick the winner in the first, Jeff? It's a maiden scramble for two-year-olds."

The General shook his head. "Seems like I can't think of anything but Johnny Walker as a winner. I want that race just like you was making up the official form chart, Kid. The others you can kind of practice up on, how's that?"

"Fair enough, Jeff. It don't look like much of a card, though—large fields, green Mexican jocks, and bad acting horses. The best stables are gone."

He busied himself describing the crowd, iden-

RIDERS UP!

tifying the various judges and timers, and picturing to the General odd characters of a type to be found on every race track. The Information Kid was in his element at this sort of thing. No artist ever imbibed more atmosphere in less time than old Jeff absorbed from his companion and stored up for use in Miramar home, where they changed the sheets twice a week and served ice cream on Sundays.

The bugle called the first field to the post, and the Kid translated the numbers as the entries filed past. A brief delay at the barrier—surprisingly brief for maidens—and they were off.

"Wake Robin gets the call," reported the Kid, "that thing of Felton's second, Cotton Queen third. . . . Into the stretch, same way—Kitty Marsh closing up on the outside. . . . Here they come, Jeff. . . . Four of them driving. . . . Wear 'em down, Kitty, you're the gamest. . . . Yah, yah, yah! . . . What did I tell you? Nice little filly. . . . Kitty Marsh a length and going away, Wake Robin second, Cotton Queen third. . . . Here's the time—36 3-5. Not so bad for three furlongs on this track, *not so—bad!*"

Old General Jeff moved restlessly. "Johnny——"

"Lots of time," soothed the Kid. "Johnny

JOHNNY COMES HOME

ain't scheduled to do his high dive until the seventh race. They're ashamed to trot him out in full daylight."

The afternoon wore on. Contrary to general expectation, the horses ran fairly well to form, and the "sharpshooters" were getting the worst of it. One after another good things failed to materialize, and public choices romped home in front.

"The stewards are on the job," opined the Kid. "I'll bet they read the riot act to some of these owners this morning. That fifth race was supposed to be pickings for old man Barlow, but you noticed they switched jockeys on the favorite, and his filly didn't get in the money. Put it down that he's off somewheres in a corner crying. Jeff, you and me are the only wise guys out here this afternoon."

The General clawed again at his sideburns. "Johnny Walker——"

"Lord God, Jeff! Can't you think of nothing else? Here I'm trying to give you a good time, and all you're doing is raving about a gopher. That thing don't *run*—he just digs himself into the ground and disappears."

"He's going to swing around that turn," insisted the other; "he's going to come marching home."

RIDERS UP!

"Oh, all right," agreed the Kid, "all—right!"

And finally, a bugle, sounding "taps," called the last field of the season to the post.

"Now," pleaded old General Jeff, "give me everything, Kid, I want to *see*."

Obediently, the Information Kid leveled his glasses.

"Six furlongs, claiming," he reported, "field of six starters. Post numbers. Williams on Sandtown, number one; E. Scott on Sea Wave, two; Captain Ace with Froggie up, three; Peach King, Dugan, number four; Johnny Walker——"

"Ah!" said Jeff, "who?"

"Wilson, coon boy, ninety-eight pounds, good kid but weak arms. Candle Flame, number six, McCarthy up. Others scratched."

The Kid hailed an usher. "Price on Johnny Walker?" he inquired.

"Write your own ticket, hundred to one in the books last I heard—anything doing, Kid?"

"Not with me there ain't."

"Where are they now?" prompted the General.

The Kid raised his glasses again.

"Going to the post. Say, Jeff," he added quickly, "I believe you called the turn at that! Johnny Walker's full of run, he's soaping; they've

JOHNNY COMES HOME

got him crazy with hop. What d'ye know about that?"

"I told you," said the General simply—"I just knew he'd win to-day—a hundred to one!"

"Keep your shirt on, Jeff—I've seen that sort of thing go wrong a hundred times. Now they're at the barrier. Johnny's raising hell. There he goes—busting the webbing. The boy can't hold him. He'll run his race right there!"

"I wish I could *see*," whispered the General. "I wish I could see. Who's the starter?"

"Hurley—a good man, too—never uses the whip even on a bad actor. But I'll bet he's laying the law down to them. I know just about what he's saying; 'Swing that damn goat into place,' he's telling 'em, 'Wilson, who taught you how to ride? Come over here with that rail horse. . . . Dugan, I'll remember you for that! Don't tell *me* you're crowded. . . . Get back where you belong. Get out of that tangle, get out of it! No, no, *NO!* Now try it all over again. Hold it, Williams—hold it— Number five horse come up on the outside easy . . . that's right . . . look sharp, Froggie . . . now swing number three . . . swing him. . . . *You're off! Get away, get away, get away!*'"

A burst of color at the near turn—a hysterical

RIDERS UP!

gasp from General Jeff, and the Kid's high sing-song, crying:

"John-ny Walk-er in the lead. . . . Captain Ace, Sea Wave, Sandtown, Peach King, and Candle Flame. . . ."

A splash of lavender sky-rocketed down the back stretch amid a roar of wonder from the stands.

The Kid's shrill voice rose above the clamor.

"At the half—Johnny by three lengths, Captain Ace second by two, Sea Wave third, and Peach King hanging on. Candle Flame stopping badly."

Old General Jeff struggled to his feet and stared across the white-washed circle, but he could not see.

"At the three-quarters. Johnny by five lengths. . . ."

A sightless old man in the front row of the stands waved both arms in the air.

"Johnny Walker!" he babbled. "Johnny Walker! . . ."

Suddenly the air was rent with exultant yells—a brand-new note of triumphant derision.

"Into the stretch, Johnny Walker by a length and quitting fast," droned the Kid, "Captain Ace nails him. It's all off, Jeff—Johnny's through. . .

JOHNNY COMES HOME

The General's wrinkled hands clawed at the Kid's shoulders. His face was livid. "No, no—no!" he pleaded, "don't tell me that, Kid—I've just *lived* for this. Johnny's *got* to win—he's just got—" The General choked.

The Information Kid hesitated for the fraction of a second, eyes slanting at the pitiful figure by his side. Then he looked again at the on-rushing field. The Kid was a sport. He jammed the glasses into their case, and jerked off his cap.

"By God—Jeff!" he yelled, "he's coming again, Johnny Walker's driving again. He's got Captain Ace as sure as hell. He's shaking him off!"

Down the tan stretch thundered the pack, one horse bursting ahead. A slim figure in a checked suit leaned over the railing; his voice drowned out the babel that rose from below, and all Tijuana learned that day how the Information Kid could root.

"Here he comes, Jeff—just like you said—he's *marching* home! Come on, you Johnny! Come on, you boy! One length, two lengths, three! Johnny Walker . . . Johnny Walker . . . Oh, what a show! All by himself . . ."

"Johnny Walker!" shrieked the General, "a hundred to one! *Oh my God!*—Johnny Walker!"

A thunder of hoofs past the stand, a blast of

RIDERS UP!

cheers from the crowd, and the Information Kid bawling at the top of his lungs:

"Johnny Walker by *five* lengths! Johnny Walker, *Johnny Walker*, JOHNNY WALKER! . . ."

He dropped back exhausted, flipped a silk handkerchief from his pocket, mopped his face, and turned to grin at General Jeff.

The old newsdealer stood, a mute moment, with his face transfigured. Then he fumbled in his inside pocket, and produced a clump of cardboards.

"I had him right on the nose, Kid. Twenty-five hundred dollars for old Jeff, so's he can get into Miramar home! Couldn't have made it in no other way! Twenty-five dollars was every penny I had. . . . Ain't God good?"

The Information Kid was paralyzed.

"W—what," he stammered, "what's that? Let me see them tickets."

He snatched at the square pasteboards and saw that they bore the mark of an uptown poolroom, and all told they called for a hundred to one on Johnny Walker, twenty-five times!

"I couldn't have saved no pile like that," explained the General, "you ought to have guessed that, Kid. I just made arrangements because I *knew* old Johnny was going to come marching

JOHNNY COMES HOME

home to-day—I just *felt* it. Why, what's the matter, Kid?" His voice trembled and he pawed beseechingly at his companion. "There's no mistake, is there Kid? They wouldn't gyp old Jeff out of a home, nobody would do *that!* They say Johnny Walker, all right, don't they, Kid? They call for twenty-five hundred, don't they? It's going to take every cent. . . . Kid, what's the matter?"

The Information Kid blinked down at the winner's circle, where a little hunchback with a pale face was holding up his whip for permission to dismount from Captain Ace. But the imagination plays queer tricks once in a while. The Kid visioned only a little jay street in a little hick town, and a faded figure waiting by the gate. . . .

A low moan from General Jeff brought him to himself, and the hustler stared at his old pal, and then down at the pasteboards. . . .

"It's all right, Jeff," he assured, "I was just knocked silly for a moment. The tickets are jake—they're good as gold, and you got the luck of a graveyard rabbit. You come with me."

For reasons of his own, the Kid elected to take his companion home after the crowd had gone, and then only in a machine where they could have the rear seat to themselves. In San Diego, old Jeff waited outside on the sidewalk while his guide

RIDERS UP!

entered the Harper Brothers poolroom and came back a few minutes later with a roll of currency in his hand.

"There you are, Jeff—I counted it twice—and it's O. K. Now let's do the thing up right. I'll get a taxi and we can go out to your place and get your things and then I'll take you up to that home——"

"That's it," enthused the General, "I want you to see it, Kid. I'll be living pretty swell for old Jeff. They change the——"

"Ye-ah, I know," said the Kid. "Let's get started."

And on the way old Jeff indulged in a little quiet gloating.

"I just knew I'd finish ahead of the game," he confided, "but there ain't many can do it. If I was you, Kid, I'd go right home, and let the track alone. You got a chance to make a nice start in some business. Me—all I can do now is just remember how old Johnny come marching home. The way you talked, Kid, I could just *see*. I bet I'll make some of those other fellows listen to me when I tell 'em——"

"I wouldn't say nothing about it, Jeff. I wouldn't let anybody know nothing about Johnny Walker; just let people think you saved the money up. People will think more of you. Some

JOHNNY COMES HOME

folks are set against betting. I wouldn't give them the satisfaction of thinking you're up there just as the result of a bet."

"I guess you're right," nodded the General. "Guess I'd better not say too much about any one race in particular."

They entered the broad drive of Miramar Home, brushed past red geraniums, and found themselves in the final port of call for old General Jeff.

After they had toured the building, and the Kid had supervised the installation of his friend's few possessions in the little room on the top floor, he held out his hand gravely.

"Good-by, old scout."

Old General Jeff was inclined to sniffle a little bit. "Good-by, Kid—you been mighty kind to an old man to-day. Maybe I'll never see you again, but I won't forget you, boy—always think of you. Remember what I said, Kid—you go on home now and enjoy yourself. Good-by, Kid."

"Good luck, old timer—and you have my best regards! . . ."

The Kid boarded a street car and alighted in the downtown district. He hesitated on the curbing a moment, and then made his way to the establishment of Abe Goldwater, a business acquaintance of long standing. When he emerged

RIDERS UP!

he was minus the sparkler in his plutocratic purple tie. His fingers fumbled mechanically in coat pockets and encountered two open safety pins. He grinned, and tossed them in the gutter.

On the opposite corner stood the drugstore maintained by Billy McLaughlin. Prompted by the condition of his vocal cords, the Kid crossed the street.

"Why, hello, Kid," said the proprietor. "Who won the last race? I had to leave early."

The Kid shrugged. "I dunno—I was watching Johnny Walker."

"Johnny Walker? Where did he finish?"

The Information Kid eyed with mild interest a package of ant exterminator.

"Finish?" he echoed, "*finish?* Why, those kind of dogs aren't supposed to finish, are they? The last I saw of Johnny Walker he was making a swell attempt to run backwards, and I guess he's still doing it! . . . Say, Mac, what's good for a sore throat?"

V. THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

MAJOR ROBERT ARLINGTON, of Fairfax County, raced his horses "fo' the hono' of the stable and the glo'y of Vi'ginia, suh!" They were distance horses, mostly of the Gloriana strain, and they liked to come bobbing into the stretch in about third place, one position out from the rail, and five or six lengths behind the leaders.

It was Major Bob's supreme pleasure to stand very erect in the clubhouse gallery, glasses on the advancing field, and watch his colors come from behind—to see his horses eat up the intervening gap and then fight it out for the wire in a nose-and-nose finish such as the judges hate.

As far back as any one could remember, there had always been an Arlington entry in the Christmas Handicap at New Orleans; and every unattached jockey, every dusky rubber, every knight of the rag, considered it his bounden duty to support that entry. As soon as the first horse shoved its nose around the turn, the paddock contingent jammed against the railing and gave tongue.

RIDERS UP!

"Come on, you Major Bob!" "Oh, you Santa Claus!" "Oh, you Christmas dinner!" "Come on, you Virginia!" "Come on—come on—come on!"

A heart-smothering finish, with little Sutherland outriding the pack, and then Major Bob would saunter from the winner's circle back to the clubhouse oasis, where he could rest a highly polished boot on a brass railing, acknowledge congratulations, and listen to the inevitable: "Major, won't you join us?"

Such invitation always prompted the Major to press his broad-brimmed black hat a little more firmly over white hair, transfer his cane from right hand to the crook of the left arm, and reply: "Don't ca' if I do, suh!"

In the evening there was a Christmas dinner at the old Cosmopolitan, just opposite the Sazerac, or at La Louisienne, where M'sieur Jules presided, and every one of the hundred-odd jockeys, stable boys and swipes, found a five-dollar bill under his plate.

The dinner was served in Southern style with Virginia ham coated with molasses and pepper and baked in wine, suckling pig, turkey, and candied yams. Lastly there was always an enormous lighted plum-pudding with a sprig of holly, and then Major Bob arose for the toast.

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

"Y'all happy down the'?"

The affirmation came in a yell, knives and forks banging.

"Y'all a-goin' to be heah next yeah?"

Again the chorus and the clatter.

Then the toast, Major Bob's voice ringing clear and vibrant:

"Mo' sensitive than a woman, mo' cou'ageous than a man—the tho'oughbred, suh—God and Vi'ginia!"

Oh, he was a type! A motion-picture director would have wept for joy at beholding him. Very tall and very erect, a white carnation at his buttonhole, a pre-war mustache and a dab of white on the chin. After the manner of all Arlingtons, he honored a woman, worshiped a horse, doted on Virginia twist and mint julep—the latter unspoiled by a straw.

Time, the relentless shearer, deprived Major Bob of many things. The heyday of glory and romance passed from the race tracks of the country, leaving but an afterglow; New Orleans laid sacrilegious sewers in the Vieux Carre; the Eighteenth Amendment made an ice-cream parlor out of Henri's Petit Place on Iberville Street; one after another of his intimate associates passed on—and there remained only the Christmas

RIDERS UP!

Handicap and Christmas "paddock dinner," by which to perpetuate tradition.

The Major grew a little thinner and a little straighter, and finally he sold his last stake-horse, Rapidan, in order that he might still play the princely host on Christmas Day.

He was then reduced to a single colt, a magnificent youngster, the first son of Rappahannock, out of the great mare Heart o' Virginia. The Major named him Charlestown and turned down an offer of twenty thousand dollars before the youngster had even faced the barrier.

"A tho'oughbred after my own heart, suh," he said, "a colt that is of the family; as well ask me to sell my own son, suh!"

Charlestown came of age on the first day of the year, while the Major was at Tijuana. Hustlers, watching the early morning workouts, tabbed the colt as "the sweetest baby that ever looked through a bridle."

The Information Kid, who worked for "And You" McIvor, and who knew everything, even to a recipe for brandy that would make a jackrabbit spit in the face of a greyhound, reported his conclusions to his employer:

"The Major's little go-getter is primed and cocked for the question. He'll look the judges in the mug on the first start."

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

The morning before Charlestown was to make his début in the Juvenile Stakes, Major Bob visited the track to watch the workout. And during the night an inquisitive gopher burrowed under the rail of the back-stretch so that when Charlestown came breezing along with a little colored boy on his back, the colt's left forefoot encountered a pile of soft dirt with a hole underneath.

The Major climbed the fence and cut across the center field. Rail-birds and clockers fluttered in the same direction. They converged upon a bay colt floundering on three legs, and a terrified little negro digging heels into the turf and clinging desperately to the reins.

"Oh, mah Gawd!" chattered the child of the stable. "He's done bus' his laig plumb off. . . . Whoa, there! . . . Yessir, Mista' Major. . . . Oh, mah God, de bones is stickin' right out!"

Major Bob took firm hold of the bridle, gave one quick glance at the jagged cannon-bone protruding from the torn flesh, another glance at the colt's eyes, large with exquisite agony, and then wheeled grimly on the bystanders.

A man in a gray uniform pushed forward in answer to the look. His arm went to a back pocket and produced an automatic.

"No hand but mine," interposed the Major. "I'll take it, suh!"

RIDERS UP!

He coaxed the colt gently off the track and into an alleyway between the stables, caressed the animal a moment, and then raised the weapon. . . .

When it was all over, the Major dusted off his coat mechanically, pocketed the automatic, straightened his shoulders and sauntered off behind one of the barns.

Fortunately, the Information Kid saw the whole thing, and he knew Major Bob. Down the track, the Kid made out "And You" McIvor, the most urbane and polished bookmaker who ever graced a betting ring. McIvor and the Major were friends of long standing. The Kid raced toward the bookmaker.

"Quick," he panted. "Charlestown broke his leg, and the Major is back of the barn with a gun! *Quick!*"

The bookmaker sprinted in the indicated direction. He gained the corner of the barn, checked himself, and then strolled leisurely to meet the owner of Charlestown.

"Ah, Major," he greeted. "Good morning. I just heard about your loss; I am very sorry."

The Major had taken his stand under a tall cotton-wood. One hand was fumbling at his coat-tails. At the sound of McIvor's voice he turned calm eyes on the bookmaker.

"A ve'y deplo'able accident, suh—deplo'able."

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

McIvor nodded. He was a splendid figure of a man, very handsome, and addicted to silk shirts, Brazilian diamonds, and a demeanor that nothing could ruffle.

Once at Saratoga, "Petroleum Billy" Smith, fresh from the oil fields, had rushed up to McIvor and offered one hundred thousand dollars on a two-and-a-half-to-one shot.

"A quarter of a million to one hundred thousand," drawled McIvor. "And is that all? Your ticket, sir, and thank you.—And you?"

That broke the plunger's nerve, and added another picturesque phrase to the vocabulary of the race track.

And You's suave voice broke the silence:

"Major, I have a claim against the Toomey stable for the pick of the string, and I value your judgment very highly. If you would consider a purely business proposition from an old friend, I should like to surrender that claim to you."

The Major's face reddened.

"Suh!"

"A purely business proposition," pursued McIvor smoothly. "I cannot run the horse myself, Major, and you can pay for him out of the winnings. It would be a terrible blow to the sport to have the Virginia colors missing from, say, the Christmas Handicap, Major!"

RIDERS UP!

The muscles on the Major's cheeks began to twitch; he located a huge bandanna handkerchief, and blew his nose very violently.

"Y'all are ve'y kind," he acknowledged. "I am powe'fully in you' debt, suh!"

McIvor linked an arm in that of the Virginian.

"This is Mexico," he reminded. "Over at San Ysidro there is a bartender from the St. Charles whose specialty is a silver fizz."

"Suh," exclaimed the Major, "you ove'pow' me!"

The Information Kid grinned as he saw them vanish through the gate. The next day he made it a point to be on hand when the Major called at the Toomey stables and, accompanied by Trainer Ted Fuller, walked along the row of white-washed stalls. The Kid trailed along at their heels, bent upon keeping the Major from making any mistakes, for the Toomey horses were known principally for their ability to read the betting odds on the way to the post.

Fuller tried to shoo the Kid away, but the latter insisted he was there as a representative of McIvor. He had something pertinent to say about every horse that was brought out.

"Thick-winded and been tubed, Major. That one gets his mail at the sixth hole. . . . Now, here's what I call a shifty baby—remember Briar

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

Rose and Secret Silver? Same stable. Take my tip, Major, and the first rattle out of the box you can hold your hat up to the gent with the green-backs. *Mucho dinero aqui!*"

Finally the Major turned on him.

"Two things I reckon you better let me pick, suh—my wife and my ho'se."

The Information Kid temporarily subsided.

Up and down the tanbark lanes marched the Major, pausing every now and then to study with the eyes of a connoisseur some satin-coated son or daughter of the turf. When he found a colt or filly whose lines pleased him, he coaxed the animal to the open half-door of the stall, ran a hand winningly across the forehead, and then looked intently at the eyes.

Once it seemed as though he was about to make his selection in King William, a four-year-old chestnut, by Prince of Orange out of Cardinella, and winner of the Baja California Stakes. The Major had seen the bay stallion finish in front many times; also he had seen him beaten once by Sunproof, the Kentucky crack. He studied the horse a long time, ejected a thin stream of dark juice at meditative intervals, and finally shook his head.

"Reckon y'all are a-going to find me ha'd to please," he sighed.

RIDERS UP!

And then in the last stall he came across a big gray gelding peering out at him.

The Major stopped in his tracks and his eyes lighted. "Ah," he said, "old Chickahominy! I was pow'fully nea' to fo'gettin' y'all had shipped him down hea'. Oblige me, suh."

The Information Kid could contain himself no longer.

"Major," he protested, "that mule couldn't run a mile downhill. He's one day older than Adam!"

The Major exploded. He was very sensitive on the subject of age.

"Dammit, suh," he protested, "a tho'oughbred is no olde' than his legs, suh!"

"That's it," wailed the Kid; "he ain't got no legs; he saw his first firing-iron during the Civil War."

"Shut up," snarled Ted Fuller, who knew by the Major's face there was a chance of unloading the option advantageously.

"A game campaigner, Major—nine years old, but still good for the sprints. His knees are scratched up a bit, but he's perfectly sound and will pay his way. Half brother, you know, to Shenandoah, and the latter shows the Gloriana strain. Stout-hearted—not a showy horse, but a good, reliable——"

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

"Sausage," cut in the Kid, "and sour at that! Major, let me wise you: Chickahominy has been running on the merry-go-tracks in Canada for three years; before that, he was in the Sullivan stables; and before that Milt York, Barney Dugan, and Billy Callender had him——"

"And befo' that, suh," said the Major with quiet dignity, "I had the hono'—the ve'y great hono'—of owning the ho'se myse'f!"

"Oh, well," said the Kid, and gave it up.

Chickahominy's ears were short and set well to the front, his face slightly concave, dipping between the eyes and nostrils; a lean jaw suggested Arab blood. The Major grasped the lower lip and found it firm; he passed a hand over the eyes where age leaves its telltale hollows, and deftly gauged the depressions. Then he stepped back, as a man does who is viewing a work of art, and permitted his eyes to take in slowly the iron-gray line that undulated from the head, dipped slightly in front of the withers, curved and rising a little along the back, swelled boldly over loins and quarters, dipping again into the flowing lines of the tail.

Next he turned his attention to Chickahominy's legs, running his hand over the scarred knees and the tendons seared by the firing-iron. One after another he picked up the hoofs, studied them, and

RIDERS UP!

released his hold. There is an old saying among horsemen: "The finer the hair, the firmer the hoof." Chickahominy's legs were silken.

Finally, Major Bob straightened up and laid a firm hand on the halter.

"Would y'all oblige me by kickin' that bucket theah?" he drawled.

Fuller looked puzzled, but a moment later a galvanized bucket banged against a post and clattered off to one side.

Chickahominy pulled back, one ear reversed, the other forward, eyes rolled back in the direction of the strange noise. The Major caught the flame of the ruby in the eyeballs. It was what he had been looking for.

"The eye of the tho'oughbred, suh, is the window of the soul; reckon I'll jes' lead the winner of the nex' Christmas Handicap to my stable, suh!"

A sound as of escaping steam came from the Information Kid.

"Dammit, suh," exclaimed the Major, "are you trying to make me lose my tempah?"

"Don't mind him, Major," soothed Ted Fuller. "You've got a good horse—only I warn you that I may go after the Handicap myself; it will be a twenty-thousand-dollar event next year."

He could not resist his little joke. "No offense,

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

Major, but now that you've made your selection I'm afraid we'll have to let King William show old Chickahominy the way to the wire next Christmas."

"In that case, suh," replied the old gentleman, "it will be our privilege—our very great privilege, suh—to see a ho'se race!"

The Information Kid watched Major Bob lead Chickahominy away. Then he hurried with his tale of woe to And You McIvor.

"Hoot-Owls in the Major's watchtower!" he wailed. "Any time Chickahominy finds his way to the pay-station again, they'll have to put Columbus in the pilot-house!"

McIvor frowned. "Too bad!" he said. "I thought of course he'd take King William. Well, funny things happen on a race track; let him alone, Kid; don't worry him."

"Huh!" grunted the Kid. "I should care if *you* don't—only there'll be a lot of guys missing the old feed-bag next Christmas, and I'll be one of them. *Chickahominy*—this way out!"

He clutched his nose with one hand, a coat lapel with the other, and led himself mournfully away.

Major Bob remained as debonair and courtly as ever. Afternoons found him in his customary seat at the track, close to the stairs. In the even-

RIDERS UP!

ings he sat in the lobby of the Grant Hotel at San Diego, one knee crossed over the other.

His friends tactfully forebore to mention the big gray gelding that was now the sole defender of colors, once the proud boast of Virginia. They believed that it was the only horse Major Bob could afford to secure. Had they known that he had been given the pick of the Toomey stables they would have been quick to tell him that Chickahominy was a sullen, worn-out stall-warmer who hadn't won a handicap event in years. They would have begged him to seek redress from Ted Fuller. With pity in their hearts they waited for the final tragedy.

But get-away day came, marking the close of the meeting, and the children of the whip and spurs departed for other pastures without Chickahominy having been once called to the barrier in his new colors.

On the third day after the bugle had sounded taps, the same little colored boy who had clung to the reins of the injured Charlestown led Chickahominy, in traveling wraps, toward a single box-car waiting on the track siding.

The Major was there to superintend the departure.

"Bubbles, you rascal, y'all a-going to be comfo'table?"

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

"Yassir, Mister Major; me an' ol' Chick is going travel jes' like a ol' Pullman; sure got a lot o' feed, an' beddin'."

Chickahominy entered the car apathetically and made himself at home in the bedded stall over the front of which a sheet was draped to keep off the wind. Box-cars were nothing new to him. They meant merely a day or two of jostling and swaying, and then a return to the routine of whip and spurs. Other horses might be turned out for a well-earned rest, but old Chickahominy had of late been owned by men who made him earn his board by taking second and third money in the selling races. There was a time when traveling clothes in the early spring would have meant Kentucky and the opening at Lexington, but that was when the huge gray was in his prime. Now the Montana circuit was the probable destination. Chickahominy munched sullenly at his feed.

But when, three days later, the box-car came to a permanent rest, and Bubbles, opening the door at a platform, cried to him, "Here we is, ol' meal-ticket—come on out yeah and wahm yo'se'f," Chickahominy stepped out into a region that was neither Montana, Kentucky, nor Louisiana.

"Dat's right, hawss, look around," encouraged

RIDERS UP!

Bubbles. "Major done say you been heah befo'. See does yo' remembah?"

Chickahominy stared with cocked ears at a circle of blue-green hills splashed with poppies; his nostrils drank in pure ozone, tepid and vitalizing; his shoulder-muscles twitched under the caress of a California sun. He wrinkled an upper lip, and committed himself to a tentative nicker.

Bubbles looked up at the station sign and spelled out: "Pleasanton—to San Francisco 41 miles."

"Sure got yeah all right," he grunted. "Wondah where am de Major?"

A figure in a broad felt hat and a black frock coat turned the corner of the road and sauntered forward.

"Bubbles, you rascal! Chickahominy, suh!"

The little negro wriggled with joy like a puppy. "Yassir, Mister Major, sure am glad to see you! When does we eat?"

"Eat, you scamp! Do y'all think that's what I brought you and that wuthless ho'se heah fo'? Eat! Why, bless my soul!"

Nevertheless he piloted both horse and boy out to the old Pleasanton track, consigned the grinning Bubbles to the boss of the exercise crew, and then turned old Chickahominy loose in a blue-grass pasture that overlooked the circular course.

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

"Y'all are an fu'lough, suh," he announced. "Six yea's ago, suh, y'all went from this heah spot to Eme'yville, and yo' upheld my hono' in the Christmas Handicap. Don't tell me you don't remembah, suh! An A'lington ho'se neva' fo'gets!"

Chickahominy wandered away, seeking apparently to put as much distance between himself and his owner as the fences would permit.

The Major walked back to town along the shaded country road, and engaged very modest quarters at the old hotel with its broad veranda fronting the main street—a street that is somehow more suggestive of the Old Dominion than of the new El Dorado.

In the long days that followed, Major Bob kept pretty much to himself. In the early mornings he took his constitutional walk as far as the station and back again and then devoted himself to the morning newspapers, and one or two racing journals which came to him by mail. Later in the day force of habit impelled him toward the track to watch the work-outs, mostly of harness horses, "cold-blooded" animals with whom he had small sympathy. In the warm evenings he enjoyed sitting in an easy chair on the porch and listening to the chatter of the pretty girls who sauntered by. Sometimes he elected to stroll over

to old Doc Kelly's cottage. The veterinarian was heavy of flesh and sparse of scalp, but he had some very excellent remedies in his cellar, and he was quite skilled in chess. Also he did not mind listening to Major Bob's description of how Warren's Corps crossed the Potomac; so the two had become quite good friends.

But there was one part of the Major's daily program that was never affected by the weather or circumstances. When the sun dipped low, and lavender shadows crept down the western hills of the Livermore Valley, Chickahominy's owner plodded up to the pasture to pay his respects to the big gelding. It was quite a while before the horse was dissuaded from the suspicion that such visits meant the end of the only vacation he had ever known. He was always alert for the sight of a halter. But at length he came to understand, by the apple or the lump of sugar left on the top rail, that his visitor was to be trusted, and in time he ate confidently out of his owner's hand, and waited for him expectantly.

Relations having been established on this basis, the Major sat on the fence in the late afternoons talking to Chickahominy.

Now, there is this about a horse: he does not reason, but he remembers; he does not comprehend words, but he responds to tones; he does

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

not recognize features, but he absorbs the spirit of his trainer.

Early summer, and the bees were buzzing in the clover. Major Bob came up to the pasture one afternoon and found Chickahominy rolling around on his back, legs waving ridiculously in the air. At his call, the gray struggled up, stared at him roguishly, and then snorted off in the opposite direction.

"Heah, suh," commanded the Major, "stop it this minute, suh! Y'all are a tho'oughbred, not a confounded ci'cus-ho'se!"

But the aged gelding merely kicked up his heels, frolicked away and then approached in a flirtatious circle. It was very evident that Chickahominy desired his owner to chase him.

The Major affected high indignation, but he was none the less delighted, for there was no mistaking the fact that the son of the great Chikamauga was beginning to feel his oats.

Then came the annual county fair, and for three days the old race-track boiled noisily; crowds drifted in and out of the live-stock tents, and in the afternoons a bugle called hot-blooded horses to the post. A battle-scarred gelding on the hillside stared at the scene below, wandered away, and returned to the bars for another look. When the Major left that night, Chickahominy followed

RIDERS UP!

along the fence and neighed shrilly. His owner looked back.

"Patience, suh!" he commanded.

The fair ended; Pleasanton drowsed again; and then one morning old Doc Kelly and little Bubbles trailed the Major up the hill.

The climb told on the veterinarian. "Glory go to Peter!" he puffed. "I thought you told me you had a stake-horse, Major; he's a goat!"

"Suh!"

"Angora, at that! Look at his hair; damn' old broken-down billy goat."

"Not a wo'd mo', suh!" flamed the Major. "Not one wo'd! I allow no man to talk about my ho'se, suh, in that——"

"Don't argue," cut in Kelly, "—it's too hot. I say he's a goat!"

The Major waved his cane. "Damnation, suh!"

"Same to you," chuckled the other, "and many of them." He was beginning to breathe a little more freely. "Well, catch your old whiskbroom, and I'll see what I can do with it; go ahead—what do you think I came up here for?"

The Major quivered irresolutely, but Bubbles slipped a halter on the restless Chickahominy, and finally they trekked dustily downward. A day later the Arlington gelding, close-clipped, hoof-

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

polished, shod and smelling vilely of old Doc Kelly's matchless liniment, occupied the same stall where years before he had munched his pre-Christmas oats.

Summer blended into the quiet fall, and Major Bob strolled over to the track every morning to watch Chickahominy thundering over the course under double wraps. The Major always asked the same question, and got the same reply from Bubbles:

"'Pears like he's roundin' to fo'm, eh, you young rascal?"

"Yassir, Mister Major, dis ol' hawss like to pull my ahms off. Sure goin' to teach them N'Awleans babies where dey gets off at."

"Likes a distance, too—eh, you scamp?"

"Sure does, for a fac', boss; does we go a half-mile, ol' Chickahominy jes' get hisself wahmed up an' int'rested; does I give him his haid, he sure ambulates; yessir, he jes' about *flies!*"

Even old Doc Kelly had to admit that the big gelding was loosening up, but he attributed it entirely to the wet bandages, the warm fomentations, and above all, to the miraculous and well-known powers of his liniment.

"Fiddlesticks!" snorted the Major, and not until he became unbearably thirsty did he condescend to speak again to the veterinarian.

RIDERS UP!

Early in November, Chickahominy worked a mile in one minute and forty-six seconds on a track that was apparently two seconds slow, and he was still going along nicely at the end.

The Major wrote a letter that night to And You McIvor at New Orleans:

It gives me great pleasure to inform you, sir, that Chickahominy is now a very capable horse. Unfortunately, circumstances will not permit of my bringing him on to New Orleans, but I trust that you still have sufficient confidence in my judgment to send for the horse, and enter him yourself in the Christmas Handicap. I should very much like to have him meet King William, who I read is doing excellently; and if you will pardon the further suggestion, Jockey Sutherland, the little lad whom I brought last year from Kentucky, has excellent hands, and is, I believe, a free lance.

Awaiting your valued advice, allow me to subscribe myself, sir—

Your old friend,

ROBERT ARLINGTON.

To which McIvor immediately replied:

The news regarding Chickahominy is deeply gratifying, but I sincerely trust that you will not allow any circumstances to prevent the Arlington colors from being represented in the Christmas Handicap. Have talked the matter over with various members of the Old Guard (they are fast disappearing, Major), and we all agree that your absence is quite unthinkable. Merely as a business proposition, I am inclosing a draft to cover expenses,

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

and we will let Chickahominy take care of the matter with interest in due time. I trust you will not disappoint your old friends.

Yours truly,

CHARLES McIVOR.

P. S. Jules wants to know if he shall prepare the customary dinner, and, of course, I said yes. Sutherland will be delighted to handle Chickahominy. The little chap loves you, Major, and he rode three winners yesterday. Best boy on the track right now.

The Major blew his nose repeatedly, and showed the letter to old Doc Kelly, and to old lady Tompkins, who ran the hotel, and to the editor of the Pleasanton *Times*, who wrote a column about the distinguished Major Arlington, "who has been summering in our midst with the famous race-horse Chickahominy." The article, boiled down, and sent to the San Francisco and Oakland papers, earned the Pleasanton journalist two dollars and seventy cents in space rates, and surrounded the Major's departure with considerable éclat. Bubbles was particularly rapturous, for New Orleans was his conception of paradise; and Gulfport, where Mammy Jackson lived, was but a short hop to the east!

December found a gray gelding scrambling from a car to the leather-colored turf of Jefferson Park, from which McIvor, the Information

RIDERS UP!

Kid, Canada Dick Tracy, and all the thousand and one characters of the race track wove a trail in and out of the city. Major Bob breathed once again familiar atmosphere, and discussed with Jules at nightfall the gustatory delights of a bouillabaisse.

Two weeks before Christmas the Information Kid cornered McIvor. The purveyor of news was very much excited.

"I seen a miracle this morning," he confided. "Old Chickahominy worked a mile in one minute and forty-one seconds with his mouth open. Look here, boss, don't let the Major waste him for the Handicap; the Toomey bunch are leveling with King William in that race, and it's sewed up. Slip the old hound into a cheap sprint right away, and we'll all get aboard for the killing."

But McIvor merely smiled. "Go tell it to the Major," he advised.

The Kid buttonholed Chickahominy's owner.

"Cheap sprint, Major," he begged. "The track's cardboard now. Don't tip your hand by letting Sutherland ride him. Put an ordinary boy up, smuggle your old sleeper in at seven furlongs and give us a chance to go into the old sock."

"Not a step, suh," thundered the Major, "— not one step until the Handicap itself; my hono' is at stake, suh!"

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

"Oh, hell!" said the Kid.

It lacked three days of Christmas when the hustler again broached the subject to McIvor. The latter's picturesque profession had been seriously affected by the pari-machines, and he was now operating "from the ground."

"Thought you told me little Sutherland agreed to ride Chickahominy."

"He did."

"Well," grunted the Kid, "he's welched, then; Ted Fuller has the boy booked for a leg-up on King William. That means they are going after the dough just like I told you. Santa Claus ain't going to pull down no twenty-thousand-dollar purse while the Toomey bunch is in business."

Major Bob received the news of Jockey Sutherland's defection to the ranks of the enemy with stupefaction. McIvor wanted to lay the case before the stewards, but the Virginian was not of that mind. He was hurt, mortally hurt, by the behavior of a boy on whom he had lavished in the bygone days gifts that reflected an old man's fancy. It was a cruel blow to another of his cherished ideals, but he chose to make light of it.

"The boy is young; it is ha'd fo' him to recognize the obligations of friendship, suh. Bubbles will ride fo' me, I reckon—a bit inexperienced, but ve'y faithful, suh, ve'y faithful!"

RIDERS UP!

McIvor managed to corner Sutherland in a restaurant that night.

"Throwing the Major down, eh?" he questioned. "Kid, you won't get very far with that kind of stuff! You've been eating off the old man every Christmas for three years, and now you slip him the double cross when it means life and death."

Little Sutherland's pale face whitened still more. "I can't explain, Mr. McIvor," he stammered. "I'm awfully sorry, but I just had to ride King William." And that's all the boy would say.

Christmas Day dawned, a New Orleans Christmas, with firecrackers exploding in the street, and the soul of the Crescent City, which is somewhat that of a coquette, beginning to forecast that delicious period which begins with Twelfth Night and climaxes deliriously in the Mardi Gras.

Out to Jefferson Park streamed the sport-loving thousands to witness the running of the Christmas Handicap at a mile and a quarter—the great majority to pin their faith to King William, the take-a-chance gentry to support Captain Adams, Cedar Lane or the Parnassus stable, and only the paddock swipes, rubbers and jockeys to risk hard-earned dollars on the Santa Claus entry. The paddock cares nothing for the dope-sheet and is

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

irreconcilably opposed to a favorite. It is the place where hunches are born, dreams materialize or dissolve, and blind loyalty persists. When in doubt, the paddock jams a pin through the entry list, or writes all the names on pieces of paper, rubs the scraps between soiled hands, and blows its breath. The last bit of paper to cling to the palm is surely the winner.

Post time brought a field of ten thoroughbreds to the barrier, and sent And You McIvor hustling up to where the Major was standing in the clubhouse balcony. McIvor had small hopes of Chickahominy finishing in the money, and he was fearful that the horse's owner would find in the Christmas Handicap a little more weight than any gallant old gentleman should be asked to bear.

Major Bob was watching the field through glasses.

"A ve'y great moment in my life, suh," he observed. "A sma't field, a ve'y excellent cou'se. In the old days, suh, reckon I'd be a-gettin' fifty to one on my ho'se and I'd be a-bettin' him right on the nose. The machines, suh, are abominable contraptions, quite abominable. I have wage'ed a hundred dolla's, but the infernal odds depend upon the entiah play—an insult to a man's intelligence, suh!"

McIvor nodded sympathetically, his eyes on

RIDERS UP!

the squirming wall of color a quarter-mile down the track. Suddenly he stiffened; electric gongs sounded, and the mob boomed into voice.

"They're off!" announced McIvor. "Good start, too! Here they come—Marietta setting the pace, King William a head on the rail, Captain Adams third—a neck. Others bunched. . . Chickahominy on the outside. Bubbles ought to hustle him up a bit, Major——"

The Major lowered his glasses and watched the field rush past the grandstand and enter the mile.

"Y'all are mistaken about Chickahominy, suh," he said quietly. "He's a Glo'iana ho'se, and they come from behin' at the propah time."

"Ah, yes—to be sure!" murmured McIvor politely.

He leveled his glasses again as the rushing hedge of color swung into the back-stretch, and the early pace-setters began to weaken.

"There goes King William! Sutherland isn't taking any chances."

A bay blur surmounted by a scarlet blouse that flapped in the wind shot out from the pack and took command by a length, then two. The grandstand clamor heightened.

"Captain Adams moving up," said McIvor. "Parnassus getting a poor ride. Ah, there goes

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

Star Balcony on the outside. Bring him up easy, boy, and you got a chance——”

“A ve’y excellent race,” said Major Bob. “A little mo’ close than I expected, but ve’y excellent.”

McIvor shot a quick puzzled glance at his companion. Accustomed as he was to seeing men mask their emotions, he could not understand the Major’s calm tone; for the race was now at the half-mile pole, King William was setting his own pace well in the lead, and, pounding along twelve lengths in the rear, Bubbles was taking the dust of the second division.

And You muttered something under his breath, but even as his fertile imagination tried to picture some way of softening the final blow, his trained eyes saw Chickahominy swing to the crown of the track where the footing was firmest, and lengthen his awkward stride. The gap of daylight between the hurrying field and the Virginia colors contracted.

The Major’s calm drawl sounded in McIvor’s ears:

“That Suthe’land boy is a powe’ful rider, but an A’lington ho’s se neve’ fo’gets, suh; reckon y’all are a-goin’ to see some tall runnin’ round heah!”

McIvor did not reply. His glasses were glued on the far turn, striving to interpret that sudden burst of speed from Chickahominy. It was too

RIDERS UP!

far to determine whether Bubbles was making his drive now, or whether the boy still had the reins around his wrists. If the former was the case, the old gelding would have nothing left in the stretch, but if he was still running under single wraps, then anything was possible.

The multitude kept its eyes on the leaders, but the discerning gentry with the field-glasses, watching for the unexpected, saw a green-and-blue sash bobbing along in seventh position, then sixth, then fifth, then become blotted out for a moment by the fourth horse.

A buzzing in the grandstand showed that the crowd now saw the new challenger and was striving to identify him.

McIvor's voice sabered the din.

"The old rock of ages! Major, look' at him take hold of Cedar Lane. He's got him, too! My God, if he was five years younger!"

The field made the far turn and straightened out into the stretch, King William leading cleverly on the rail, and four horses behind him, running abreast.

A long moment, with the triumphant pæan of the King William adherents holding undisputed sway. Then came a discordant note, the high-pitched call of the children of the paddock, and it grew in volume:

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

"Come on, you Major Bob! Come on, you Virginia horse! Oh, you dinner! Oh, you old Santa Claus! . . . King William's quitting. . . . Come on Virginia! . . . *Come on, come on, come on!*"

One position out from the rail, bandaged, badly ridden, but gaining at every jump, on came Chickahominy. He lapped King William at the paddock, lunged up to his neck; a head, a nose—and then for a moment they bobbed together, stride for stride. In that one instant, with little Sutherland banging away on King William, ding-dong, hammer and tongs, hurling the bay horse onward, Fate hesitated.

Major Bob dropped his glasses and his cane. His fingers twitched at his mustache. His voice came in an imploring whisper:

"Chickahominy, suh! . . . Vi'ginia, suh! . . . Chickahominy!"

And in the last fifty yards, with the paddock gone crazy, there was no doubt that Sutherland outrode Bubbles; but King William in turn was outgamed by a battle-scarred gray veteran with the flame of the ruby in his eyes.

In the judges' pagoda two men squinting along the wire and holding their breath agreed that in the very last jump the nostrils of the bay had been blotted out by those of the Major's horse.

RIDERS UP!

Volcanically the stands erupted, as is always the case when a long shot comes home; but high above the general babel thousands of people caught a high-pitched, shamelessly exultant rebel yell. It came from an old gentleman in the clubhouse gallery, his hat off, his immaculate cuffs disarranged, and his glorified face turned to the sky.

The Information Kid scuttled around until he found And You McIvor. The Kid had missed the best thing in his race track experience, but he was not wasting any time worrying over that.

"Slip me a case note," he bargained, "and I'll tell you why Sutherland rode King William instead of Chickahominy."

McIvor sensed that the news was worth while. He peeled off a bill and handed it over.

"Right," acknowledged the Kid cheerfully. "Now, here's the low down. Sutherland figured the race lay between the two horses. He wanted the Major's entry to win, but he didn't think the old skate could do it. So he decided to ride King William to make sure that Chickahominy would win. Get the angle?"

"On your way!" rebuked McIvor. "You're getting worse every hour. King William never got a better ride in his life!"

"Gimme a chance to finish," snapped the Kid.

THE CHRISTMAS HANDICAP

"I tell you that Sutherland figured the best way to help the Major was to give King William an easy ride, understand? But the boy couldn't go through with it; he ain't made that way; and when he got to figuring it over, he saw that Major Bob was a square-shooter too. So he went ahead and did his best, and he come damn' near beating the horse he was praying would win! Now the little fool is crying his head off in the jockeys' room because he's in dutch all around. Ain't that one for the book?"

McIvor whistled thoughtfully.

"I imagine," he mused, "the Major will be more tickled over that information than the extraordinary size of his new bank-account. You tell Sutherland that I'll fix everything up all right."

Christmas night in La Louisienne, with the long tables groaning under Southern delicacies, a five-dollar bill under each of the one hundred plates, and fat old Jules waddling around and imploring every one: "Eat, *mes enfants!* Only in Jules does a man do anything else but starve. *Allons!* The same to you, *mon brave!*"

At one end of the long room sat And You McIvor, polished knight of the Goddess of Fortune, at the other Major Robert Arlington of Fairfax County, Virginia. Bubbles headed one

RIDERS UP!

amazing line of grinning faces, little Sutherland the other. An hour passed, and Major Bob arose, not without difficulty, for rheumatism is a penalty of advancing years. But his voice held the old clear resonance.

"Y'all happy down the'?"

"You know it, Major! 'Atta old talk!"

"Y'all a-goin' to be heah again next yeah?"

What a clatter and banging!

Major Bob raised his glass. He looked down into the eager happy faces of another generation, and he realized that the relentless curtain of Time was slowly descending between them. Therefore he put his soul into the toast, and stood erect and dignified as he wished them to remember him while he rendered the epilogue to the play:

"Mo' sensitive than a woman—mo' cou'ageous than a man—the tho'oughbred, suh—*God and Vi'ginia!*"

VI. OH, SUSANNA!

“**P**RAISE be to Allah, the Beneficent King,
Lord of the Three Worlds; Blessing be
upon our Lord Mohammed, and upon
his Family and Companion Train! It has reached
me, O Auspicious King——”

At this point the Information Kid stretched out a little more comfortably in the tackle-room of old Johnny Whiskers, and permitted the copy of “The Arabian Nights” to slip from his fingers. The light from the little coal-oil lamp winked at the ragged volume open to the story of the sad Princess who never laughed. Far down the avenue of whitewashed stalls, shimmering in the warm Kentucky moonlight, a banjo strummed plaintively. Snowball, black as a prayer-book, lazy as a crocodile, was singing to the queen of the Southern three-year-olds:

*It rained all night the day I left;
The weather it was dry.
The sun so hot I froze to death—
Susanna, don't you cry!*

*Oh, Susanna, don't you cry for me.
I've come from Alabama
With my banjo on my knee!*

RIDERS UP!

And in the third stall from the right, Susanna herself listened contentedly to the serenade, while Luna, from high in the heavens, wrapped the Latonia course in a mantle of witchcraft. The night wore on, and the Information Kid, busted and supperless, slumbered uneasily, his head pillowed on a racing saddle. Finally Snowball sought his blankets, and Susanna ceased her restless stamping. Then, in the ensuing hush, the original Author of all stories compounded the formula for the narrative of the sad little Queen who did not dance. Allah bless thee, Brother, while the tale unfolds. . . .

Susanna was a slender, golden, chestnut filly of aristocratic lines, with four white stockings and a blazed face. She was by Duke of Charlestown out of the great mare Dawn o' Virginia. Horsemen had often wondered what would happen if those two temperamental racing machines were ever mated; Susanna was the answer. She was the swiftest and most conscientious little piece of horseflesh that ever sprang into action when the starter yelled: "Come on!"

"But," old Snowball used to say, "Ah never did see in all mah bawn days such a chil' for notions. Wouldn't have nothin' to do whatsum eveh with Missy Sue to-day 'cause Major's daughter done wore a silk skirt what rustled. No sir,

OH, SUSANNA!

and thar ain't nobuddy can give Susanna apples, ner sugar, ner candy—jes' tomatoes. Man, does y'all give her a tomato, she am yo' lily love, for a fac'. Sho' am de beatines' baby Ah ever sees in mah whole endurin' life!"

There were many strange things about Susanna, some of which could be explained through inheritance, while others were attributable solely to her own temperament. Race-horses have frequently been credited with possessing the traits of a capricious woman. But a more accurate simile would compare them to children, for they are extremely sensitive, instinctive in their likes and dislikes, and subject to all the notional vagaries of childhood. The higher the breeding, the more temperamental the thoroughbred.

Susanna's sire had a twelve-cylinder motor under his ribs, but he was a wolf at the post, and caused more trouble to the starting-crew than a nest of hornets. The Information Kid had it tucked away in his memory that once at New Orleans they tried for forty-five minutes to start the Duke, and finally sent the others away without him. The field had gone almost a sixteenth of the mile when the big chestnut decided it was time to hoist anchor. He won, pulled up, in one-twenty-seven, carrying one hundred and twenty-two pounds, and went into the winner's circle

RIDERS UP!

with a three-foot twitch-stick still hanging from his lower jaw. The Duke was all bulldog, and once he took it into his head to run, he was off like a flash out of a French seventy-five; and he finished with the throttle wide open, neither knowing nor caring where the wire was. He developed naturally into a very uncertain betting proposition, and finally was retired to the farm.

Dawn o' Virginia was just as high-strung, but of a different temperament. Susanna's mother had to be eased away from the post with a silk glove, and permitted to select her own sweet pace and route, the latter usually one position from the rail. She declined absolutely to run on anything but a fast track, and went without food for forty-eight hours on one occasion because Major Arlington's bull pup got a fox-tail in his ear, and had to be sent away to a specialist. Not until her canine pal was back in his accustomed box in her stall did the mare bend head to the feed-box.

But with all the peculiarities of her disposition, there was a gallant heart in the bosom of the Virginia matron. This, too, the Information Kid remembered, for he was present at Lexington when the mare was kicked at the post in a mile race for horses of all ages. She trembled and showed a desire to lie down, but the barrier went up, and her jockey hustled her away. A two-

year-old with eighty pounds and a monkey on his back beat her by a whisker at the wire, and old Major Arlington, her owner, stood on the clubhouse gallery, with the tears rolling down his cheeks. That was the time Mrs. Tuppington Smithers asked the Major sympathetically if he had lost much.

"Lost much?" exclaimed the Major. "Why, dammit, madam—Ah lost a ho'se-race!"

But the Major lost more than that, for the veterinarian reported that Dawn o' Virginia had suffered a green-tree fracture of the radial bone of the right foreleg, and had really finished on three hoofs and her golden heart. So she also was retired, and a few years later Susanna, her daughter, appeared as the glory of the Southern circuit.

If there was one thing more than tomatoes that Susanna liked, it was to romp under the wire first, and then go back to the stables and dance. Calm as a nun when going to the post, Dawn o' Virginia's daughter was a sight for the gods when Snowball led her back to the barns after she had earned her brackets. Then it took all hands and the cook to bandage her, cool her out and lay her away—for Susanna knew when she had won, and her dance of victory was the apotheosis of equine elation, needing only the final spanking from

RIDERS UP!

Snowball, and at night the twanking of the banjo, and the distant murmur of darky stable-hands gathered under a lantern outside Johnny Whisker's room, and coaxing the ivories:

"Eight's mah point, and Ah lets it ride. Throw it down, nigger, throw it down! Six and two is eight, and Ah buys me some tan dawgs. Foah and foah is eight, and Ah's on mah way. Five and three, five and three, five and three, wha' is yo'? Five and three, come to yo' daddy; five and three—and Ah spits all ovah yo' neck!"

Thus was Susanna soothed.

Now the Major's horses always ran in the money, and he always ran out of it; wherefore his debts became oppressive, and it was a case of either sell Susanna or relinquish the last hold on the family home in Virginia. He offered the filly at private auction, and shuddered when he learned that the man who took Susanna at fifty thousand dollars was an agent for Bart Nixon, gambler and fat aspirant for "social" recognition.

But the deal had been made, and Nixon ordered the filly shipped to Canada so that he could be a winning owner and strut around Dominion Springs with men who despised him. Thither, also, when the Kentucky tracks closed, went the Information Kid, because Dominion Springs was a place where money changed hands rapidly, and the Kid's eter-

nal hunch was that some day in the not too distant future the Goddess of Fortune would relent, and her sworn servitor would become the high priest at what he called a "pig-sticking."

"When little Willie does go home," he was accustomed to say, "I want the old lady to get a real kick out of it. She's been waiting ten years to see her baby boy, and believe me, she's entitled to a front seat when the big show comes off. The day I knock the props from under the betting stands, I'll buy new uniforms for the town band, and equip all the kids with Roman candles. Yea, ho!"

By ways in which none was his superior, the Kid achieved a modest bank-roll after he had been in Dominion Springs for a week, and the day Susanna started in her new colors, he slapped it all right on her nose. In the Kid's twenty-four years of life on this paradoxical planet, he had never encountered anything that looked quite so promising as that mile handicap with Teddy Powers astride the mare and only one hundred and twelve pounds in the saddle. The Kid knew that Powers was a "money-rider"; he knew also that Nixon's trainer, Jim Whalen, was one of the best men who ever rigged a thoroughbred. Ordinarily, the Kid would have been a little cautious about picking a Southern horse to win at Domin-

RIDERS UP!

ion Springs on the first asking, but Susanna figured to have both the class and the speed of the field, and the Kid appreciated that her owner was eager to capitalize his investment. It needed only the spectacle of the fat gambler openly playing his new acquisition straight on the nose, to remove the last doubt from the Kid's mind.

"Pretty soft," he muttered as the bell rang. "Track made to order, and nothing but a nice friendly lot of lizards. Here's where I go home on the cushions. They'll have to get out search warrants for the rest of the field when Susanna turns loose."

But this is the story of the sad little Princess who did not dance. Susanna led most of the journey like a wash-day long-shot, but halfway up the stretch she appeared to tire, and after a fierce drive, Arbutus got up in time to nod out Dawn o' Virginia's daughter at the wire. Five minutes later the ring was strewn with torn tickets, and the official announcer was giving the familiar O.K. to the cashiers:

"A-l-l r-i-g-h-t, here's the winner!"

The Information Kid shook himself, and grinned not uncheerfully. "Ruined again," he sighed. "I was a boob not to pay up my board-bill while I had a chance. Susanna must have been out late last night. Guess I'd better ramble

OH, SUSANNA!

down to the stalls and get an earful of the grief."

Opposite the back-stretch, where the Nixon barn was located, the Kid came across a little chestnut filly disconsolately submitting to the cooling-out process. Like most trainers, Jim Whalen was providing his own alibi at the expense of the jockey:

"Serves me right for putting a swell-head in the coop," he lamented. "I've told that kid till I'm black in the face, to ride out his mounts, but any time he gets a few lengths to the good, he sits back and picks his teeth. The filly should have finished under the bat. Anybody could see that she needed rough handling."

The Kid lit a cigarette and inhaled thoughtfully.

"Looked to me like Teddy was giving her a swell ride. Susanna is a bit short from the trip up here."

The trainer snorted contemptuously.

"Go take a run around the track," he invited. "Susanna had the race won, and a thing with three legs and a swinger stole it. Next time I'll put a boy up who knows how to spank."

A shadow crossed the Kid's lean features, and his shrewd gray eyes softened.

"Don't do that, Jim," he advised. "She's a

RIDERS UP!

good little filly, and the whip would break her heart. All them Virginia horses are sensitive, and most of 'em are cuckoo, but I'll tell the cock-eyed world they can win without no whip. Lay off the bat with Susanna, and in a race or two she'll be dancing away from the pay-station just as pretty as ever."

Whalen waved one hand in dismissal. "Any time I want any advice, I'll pay for it. You keep away from these stalls, or I'll have your badge taken up."

The Information Kid laughed softly.

"You have my best regards, and may your conscience guide you. For two bits I'd knock you into the middle of next week."

He turned away, sauntered off a distance of fifty feet, and looked back. Susanna, standing quietly while the stable-crew worked on her delicate legs, raised her head and stared listlessly in his direction. Her graceful shoulders seemed devitalized. Down somewhere in the depths of the Kid's strange soul, something fluttered—as though the Lord of the Three Worlds had breathed upon that mysterious banjo-string which men call sympathy. The Information Kid was a racetrack oddity, steeped in the wisdom of his profession, hardened in "ways that are dark, and tricks that are vain," yet ever true to a code of

OH, SUSANNA!

sportsmanship and sentiment that was all his own. Usually his emotions were aroused by beef-stew, Spanish, or the story of *Aladdin* and the wonderful lamp. But sometimes he responded to other conceits just as quaint, and his imagination led him into extraordinary channels. He looked at Susanna, once proud princess of the Southern juveniles, standing forlorn and dejected outside the barn of a man who had attained wealth by importing French champagne from Japan in the guise of soy-bean oil, and across his mind flashed the grim hunch that Nixon's colors spelled the end of Susanna's dancing. Intuitively he sensed that he was on the threshold of an equine tragedy.

"It's a gypsy curse, all right," he shivered, "—straight from Number Thirteen, Queer Street. I've seen that look in a horse's eyes before, and it's slow poison. That whip stuff goes for Sweeney. Yea, bo, Susanna's a sick horse."

He made his way sorrowfully to the boarding-house, and once again sang his customary alto to the landlady's "O Promise Me!" Upstairs in the six-by-eight bedroom he spent an hour doping the next day's card, and then plunged back into the magic pages of the *Arabian Nights*. This time he learned all about the seven suitors of the King's sad daughter, and the valiant tailor who at last won her heart; and when he finally turned

RIDERS UP!

out the light and went to sleep, it was to dream that a Genie with a red beard had presented him with a magic dancing powder, and that Susanna, ridden by the rheumatic Snowball, was coming down the stretch at a thousand to one. He woke up on the floor shouting and heard old man Murphy, in the next room, pounding on the wall and demanding quiet in the name of all the saints and the police.

"Guess I need some of old Doc Kelly's pills," commented the Kid when he got up the next morning; "them and about a hundred bucks. Let's see, now, who did I shake down last?"

One after another he checked off his list of acquaintances without discovering any one who appeared likely to part from "a century." The truth was that there were many visitors in Dominion Springs who were exactly in the Kid's predicament, for the town boasted seventeen bathing-places, one hundred and fifty games of chance, and a race track. For its size it was undoubtedly the greatest cleaning establishment on the continent.

"Guess I'll have to turn dish-washer," sighed the Kid. "There's one thing about pearl-divers: they don't go hungry—though I'll tell the wide world it's a sloppy profession."

But opposite the Turf Exchange the Kid

bumped into a new arrival, "And You" McIvor, Kentucky bookmaker, and the most polished Chesterfield of chance that ever hung up a card in a betting-ring.

"Hail, Columbus!" shouted the Kid. "Now I know how the old bird felt when he sighted land. A hundred dollars, Mac, and I'm yours for the season. Quick, before I eat up your cuff-buttons."

McIvor smiled and reached for his wallet. Many a time in the old days at New Orleans and in Kentucky he had staked the Information Kid and profited by the transaction.

"The pleasure is mine, son," he assured him now, and handed over a roll of bills. "What's on your mind?"

"Ham and eggs right now," the Kid answered. "Later on I've got some poison to unload. If you're going to cut in to-day, keep the price short on Warfield in the third race—the Hyland crowd are shooting, and they've got the money placed from here to Egypt."

McIvor nodded, aware that this tip alone was worth ten times the sum he had just advanced.

"While I think of it," added the Kid, "here's another one to stick in the old hat-band: next time Susanna starts, take their money till the bell rings, and don't weaken."

McIvor fingered the white carnation in his but-

RIDERS UP!

tonhole. "I rather expected to do just the opposite, son. What's wrong?"

The Kid eyed his friend soberly. "I can't quite dope it out, but I'm afraid the Major's little go-getter will never dance again. Tell you what, Mac—first time you get a chance to lamp a work-out, watch the way she pulls up."

"Pittsburgh Phil theory, eh?"

"Well, there's a lot to it, Mac. When a filly is on edge and full of run, she don't pull up the way Susanna does. If you'll listen to me, the little girl is sick."

"More likely she's shot her bolt," McIvor deliberated. "The history of the game is full of great two-year-olds that failed to carry on, especially fillies."

"Not the Virginia line," the Kid reminded him; "all them horses are deep-chested and bred to the purple. Handle 'em right, and they'll stick their nose in front of anything that runs. Excuse me, Mac; I got to make a dive for the feed-bag, or I'll croak. See you at church!"

Three days later Susanna went to the post again, and in the saddle was Jockey Bat Maguire, recognized by many authorities as the strongest pilot in the country. Susanna was the medium of a heavy plunge by the Nixon crowd, who hoped to recuperate their losses on the previous start.

Maguire got her away well, but at the three-furlong pole she began to lag, and Nixon's jockey drew whip. Susanna swerved under her first punishment, lost her stride, swung out at the stretch, and then, when it was too late, finished like a wild horse on the outside of the track and in fifth place.

The Information Kid was down at the first-furlong pole when Susanna was being led back to the stable. The little filly's eyes were large with terror, and under the blanket every silken muscle was quivering. There was no pride in the curve of her dainty head, no challenge in the distended nostrils—nothing but despair and anguish written in every line of Susanna's slim figure.

The Kid's lips buttoned, and his mind flashed back to the afternoon when Susanna, at fifteen to one, captured the Lexington Baby Stakes on her first start, and then dragged four colored grooms twice around the barn in a terpsichorean revel. That was but the first of her triumphs, and the Information Kid had played her every time.

"It's murder, all right," he muttered. "That guy Nixon has put the old oofy-goof on the little filly; there ain't no Virginia horse that can live under the colors of a crook. Yea, bo—one of these days she'll bust herself against the fence,

and then some greasy slob will walk forward with a gat. *Bang!*—and the glue-works. A hell of a finish for a queen!”

He tramped disconsolately back to the ring, and McIvor beckoned to him. The bookmaker had followed the Kid's advice and had bet the followers of Susanna to a standstill.

“Nixon and his trainer just had a fist-fight back of the stands,” confided McIvor. “Bart accused Jim of doping the filly, and he's gone down to the barns with a veterinarian. See what you can find out.”

The Kid shook his head gloomily. “No use. I was talking to one of the stable rubbers last night, and he told me Susanna was the poorest feeder he ever saw. I didn't say nothing, but I know that when she's right, she's a manger glutton. One of the jocks told Whalen about the filly being daft over tomatoes, and he ordered a basket of them. All she did was back away. There's no veterinarian going to cure that look in Susanna's eyes. She's just beggin' for something, and if I knew what it was, I'd get it for her, even if it was my right leg.”

The handsome knight of the blackboard favored his friend with a curious glance, but he refrained from comment. Experience had taught him that sentiment usually interfered with good

OH, SUSANNA!

judgment, and the latter was his stock in trade. The fact that Susanna had raced thirty pounds below form had made a difference in his favor of fifty thousand dollars. His chief concern was to make sure that her indisposition was not such that it would vanish overnight as soon as the price-layers grew careless, and Bart Nixon slipped the right word to his friends.

But the Information Kid had called the turn. One after another, as the days went by, skilled veterinarians examined Susanna, and none could diagnose her ailment. Dawn o' Virginia's daughter remained in her stall, quiet and sad-eyed, and the golden-chestnut limbs with the white stockings moved only automatically in the hopeless early morning exercise.

Watch in hand, the Information Kid perched on the top rail, clocking the workouts and looking always for the day's three-star special, but of one thing alone was he clear in his mind: Susanna was growing frailer every day.

Knights of the rag spread the tip straight from the fodder-troughs that the Virginia star would never wear racing-plates again. She had internal hemorrhages, they said, and Nixon was trying to unload her while there was yet time. The Information Kid scowled at this explanation, and continued to revolve other theories in his fertile

imagination. Gradually, Susanna's plight became an obsession like unto nothing he had ever before experienced. And somehow the fancy crept into his mind that Dawn o' Virginia's daughter needed but the appearance of a fairy Prince with a magic wand, to regain all her beauty and ambition.

"It's them damn 'Arabian Nights,' he sighed. "I'll have to give that stuff the gate, or they'll pasture me among the daffodils."

Nevertheless the legend of the King's sad daughter persisted in haunting him, and one morning while he was chatting with Henry the Rat down by the five-sixteenths pole, he expressed himself audibly.

"There ain't nothing wrong with Susanna except that she's jinxed. That guy Nixon is one of them ogres you read about who keeps a little dame in chains, and Susanna is just waiting for a Prince to come along, or a Genie, and say: 'Too-lie-woolie, abracadabra!' Then you'd see her dance!"

Henry the Rat squinted up the rail to where a group of visitors were strolling toward the Nixon barns.

"Shouldn't wonder if you were right, Kid," he grunted, "and, strike me blind, if here don't come your Prince!"

Not a hundred feet away, Bart Nixon was

OH, SUSANNA!

waddling along a tanbark path that skirted the stalls, and by his side stalked Haidar Ali Kolhapur, Maharaja of Baroda and Indore, ruler of seven million people, by His Majesty's grace, and owner of seventeen wives and four race-tracks. A white turban surmounted a face of dark velvet. Across the bosom of his frock coat flashed a row of jeweled decorations. One hand swung lightly a gold-headed cane. The Information Kid slid slowly from his perch.

"Oh, Daddy!" he breathed. "Look who's here! Pipe the medals, Henry! Even money says he's the Banjo King of Alabama, or the world's champion crap-shooter."

"Not so loud," implored the Rat. "That ain't no dinge. I'm telling you he's a Prince, and he holds up his pants with diamonds. I read all about it in the paper. Jakey Schultz gave me the low-down just this morning. Nixon is trying to unload Susanna on his Royal Nibs at a fancy price. He's give it out that they been pulling the filly—get me? Chance for one of us to pick up a little change by spilling the beans. Are you ready below?"

"Oh, shut up," censured the Kid. "You'd gyp your grandmother out of her false teeth. Look, they're going to bring Susanna out. Let's go over and get an earful."

RIDERS UP!

They sauntered over to the low-roofed line of stalls where Nixon, Jim Whalen, Prince Kolhapur, and members of the latter's party were awaiting the appearance of the filly. Presently a groom approached leading the daughter of Dawn o' Virginia. The quiet dignity with which Susanna conducted herself struck at the Kid's heart.

"She's past caring what happens," he muttered. "Henry, if your cannibal friend knows anything about horses, he'll keep his kale in his pocket."

Susanna sidled away from Nixon, and then whirled back on her haunches as Jim Whalen stepped toward her. The movement brought her in line with the ruler of seven million people. The Prince advanced confidently and placed a firm ebony hand on the halter of the sad little Princess who did not dance. Then a very strange thing happened. Dawn o' Virginia's daughter flung up her head and stared at Prince Haidar Ali Kolhapur. Delicate ears flexed forward and back; high lights dawned in the lustrous eyes; a white plush muzzle stretched timidly toward the royal face; and with a shrill whimper of equine ecstasy, Susanna reared up and pawed the air. Forward and back, she plunged—nuzzling at the shoulder of the Heaven-born, striving with unmaidenly squeals to win his favor.

OH, SUSANNA!

The Information Kid clutched at his companion.

"My Gawd!" he gasped. "Do you see what I do?"

"She's dancin', all right," Henry acknowledged. "Ain't that just what you said she'd do if she lamped a prince? That guy is good."

The Kid blinked dazedly. "I'll say he is," he echoed.

The frock-coated potentate released the halter, swept a quieting hand along Susanna's throat, and turned to Bart Nixon. He said in perfect English:

"The filly is built on fast lines, but I'm searching for a little sturdier stock—larger-boned animals that can pack weight and go a route. You know we don't fancy the sprints quite so much in India, and I rather imagine the Derby distance would be a little far for her. No offense intended, you know, but she seems a bit weedy, eh?"

"The Virginia fillies are all slender," Whalen acknowledged, "but they've got plenty of heart and bottom. Susanna was hurried a bit this spring, and she's a little sour, but she'll work out of it. Take my word for it, Prince; these last two races have just been pipe-openers.

RIDERS UP!

There's nothing in Canada that will lead Susanna to the wire."

Henry the Rat nudged his colleague. "Ain't that rich?" he whispered. "If Susanna was matched against a lame snail, Jim wouldn't bet a plugged nickel on her chances; he told me so himself."

But the Information Kid made no reply. He was staring in mystification at the Virginia thoroughbred; and Susanna in turn had her lovely eyes riveted beseechingly on Prince Kolhapur, as though imploring him not to leave her.

The sportsman from the Far East hesitated a moment, and then rendered the imperial verdict. "A splendid filly, Mr. Nixon, a credit to your stable, I am sure—but far too delicate for such a long journey. If you don't mind, I'll take a look at your stallions."

Ten minutes later Susanna was turned out to pasture in a field just back of the Torpington stables. On his way to the track restaurant the Information Kid paused for another puzzled look at the daughter of Dawn o' Virginia. The filly was standing disconsolately at the barred gate, mournful eyes turned toward the road down which the Prince had vanished.

The Kid tossed fretfully on his cot that night, staring up into the darkness, and arguing that the

thing was impossible. For the first time in his life he was a prey to the green-orbed jackals of jealousy. Susanna had danced at the mere sight of a man who cared nothing for her, and the Kid's divine hunch that he himself was to be the fairy Prince who would lift the spell was rudely blasted.

"The big black stiff!" he grunted. "I don't see why she should fall for him, even if he *has* got a lot of dough. The big black——"

And then he sat bolt upright, galvanized by the shock of sudden inspiration.

"Oh, Susanna!" he cried. "*I got you!*" I win the pup with the screw tail! Twenty minutes for a new book, gents; and—believe me or no—Susanna and I are going to take you all to the cleaners!"

Early the following morning a strange apparition glided from behind a corner of the Torpington barns and shuffled toward the pasture gate. It was the figure of a slim youth, attired after the manner of a stable roustabout. Face and hands were the color of a first-class brand of stove-polish, but back of the ears the skin showed no traces of African origin, and the battered hat was pulled closely down over sandy hair. The visitor sprawled lazily against the gate, and Susanna tossed her head and stared at him. Pres-

ently a drawling voice floated toward the sad little Princess. It held a thousand memories of the Southland in its musical inflection.

"Lawd A'mighty, if tha' ain't Susanna! Wha' y'all been, honey chil'? Come on ova' heah, Babe, till Ah sees does y'all want a tomato for breakfast.' Yah, yah, yah! Sho' am de beatines' baby!"

Dejection dropped from the golden-chestnut frame of Susanna. Dawn o' Virginia's daughter danced joyously toward her visitor, all a-quiver. The tomato disappeared, and Susanna made a frantic effort to lick the Information Kid's face, and then eat up his cotton shirt. Chuckling with glee, he held her at bay.

"Ain't no way a-tall to treat yo' gen'leman friend," he protested. "Gen'leman frien' wut's come clear from Kaintuck jes' t' see whut done ail his honey gal. Does yo' love yo' daddy, Susanna? Whoa, hawss! Whoa, er Ah'll bus' yo' from heah ter de Promised Land!"

But Susanna continued to caper crazily, for the sad little Princess was at the gates of Paradise, the keys to which were held by a youth with stove-polish on his face.

His gray eyes shining, and his slim figure once more in its accustomed habiliments, the Kid

sought out McIvor and went straight to the point.

"Buy Susanna for as little down as Nixon will take, and make the balance payable in thirty days. Meantime, give her to me. The Dominion Stakes are just a month away, and if the filly don't look the judges in the mug after that race, the deal is off!"

McIvor looked twice at the Kid to make sure the latter was not joking.

"Forget it, son," he admonished, "that little filly is through. Anyway, I'm not buying horses; I'm laying against them, and between you and me, the last week has cost me a hundred thousand. If you want fifteen hundred yourself——"

"I do," said the Kid, "and I want it quick."

The gambler wrote out a check and handed it over. Gravely the Kid accepted the white slip, folded it and tore it into small pieces.

"Now," he instructed, "you take that fifteen hundred and give it to Nixon as first payment on Susanna. If you don't want to put up the balance in thirty days, I'll find some one who does. All I ask is that you tell people you've sent her away for a rest, and if I give you the word, you pay her starting-fee in the stakes."

McIvor frowned.

"What are you going to do with her?"

"Take her on the tracks and keep her a week ahead of the circuit. When they're running at Blue Heather, she'll be working at Kensington; when they move on to Kensington she'll be galloping at Grace Arbor. That will bring her back here one week before the others, and then Susanna will pay for herself in the stakes."

The big bookmaker sighed. Under a mask of urbanity and nonchalance, he felt the strain of thirty years spent in the hectic whirl of the betting-ring. He would have given a great deal for the youthful sentiment and courage reflected in the Kid's lean features. But it was a long time since McIvor had read *The Arabian Nights*. He knew that the Dominion Stakes would attract the best three-year-olds in Canada, and he had seen Susanna dropping steadily below her form. He put a paternal hand on the Kid's shoulder:

"Son, you're not keeping your ear as close to the ground as usual. Nixon bought Sir Barry out of the Torpington stables yesterday, and that's the horse that has the Dominion at his mercy. Better take two thousand and treat yourself to a little vacation, son; you're slipping."

The Information Kid fumbled for a cigarette, lit it, and for a few moments smoked silently. Sir Barry was a husky three-year-old with a reputation of being able to break the heart of any

horse he hooked up with. Sir Barry would have the stamina, Susanna the speed; what about class? The Kid closed his eyes, concentrated a moment, and concluded that it was a toss-up. Sir Barry came from the Black Sophia family; Susanna traced her line clear back to Herod the Second. That was the cold "dope." But there was another angle. Susanna had the Virginia temperament, and that is something which is not to be understood save by people like old Major Arlington, or Snowball, or race-track hustlers who fall for *The Arabian Nights*.

"I'll go home after I see Susanna dance her way free from that guy Nixon," averred the Kid, "and not before. Don't worry none about me slipping. Play Susanna, and I'll show you how to cover this lawn with dead geese."

McIvor capitulated with a shrug. "Where do you want her?"

"Old man Humphrey's barn will do. I'm wiring to-night for some medicine."

"Medicine?"

"Ye-ah, from Latonia; when it gets here, Susanna and I are going away on a honeymoon."

Four days later, when Nixon had turned the daughter of Dawn o' Virginia over to McIvor under an option that called for twenty-five thousand additional in thirty days, Susanna and the

RIDERS UP!

Information Kid were quartered at the deserted Blue Heather track. The same night there arrived from Kentucky a special consignment of medicine based upon an *Arabian Nights'* prescription.

The days passed. The bang-tails moved on to Blue Heather, Kensington, and then Grace Arbor. No one thought any more of Susanna, though her name remained among the eligibles for the Dominion Stakes. Henry the Rat heard a vague rumor, and he spoke to Mose Littleton, who clocked for Mannie Goldberg.

"Hear anything about a chestnut filly that's breaking watches just ahead of us? Guy down at the hotel last night said he saw some baby work six furlongs in one-twelve and three-fifths, at Kensington, with a coon boy sittin' still."

Mose grunted. "That ain't working," he commented, "that's flying! The guy was crazy. Kensington is a dead slow track, and there ain't nothin' around here that can step that fast."

They were sitting on the top rail, heels hooked on the lower board, stop-watches in hand. Down the back-stretch a horse broke into full stride. As he passed the half-mile post, two rail-birds deflected their thumbs.

"Sir Barry, ain't it?" queried the Rat. "Whoops, muh dear, lookit that thing turn

OH, SUSANNA!

loose! Guess he ain't on razor edge. There's a race-horse!"

"Whalen had got him pointed for the Dominion; he and Nixon are going to sink the ship," confided Mose. "It takes a bunch of crooks to have all the luck."

Sir Barry flashed past, and they looked at their watches.

"Wow!" exclaimed the Rat. "Twenty-three and one-fifth, forty-seven and one-fifth, and with his mouth open; I'll say that bird is ready!"

No one ever knew what it cost the Information Kid to tear himself away for thirty days from the game that he loved. But And You McIvor guessed a little of the truth, after he ran across Major Robert Arlington in the lobby of the Dominion Springs Hotel the night before the big race. Susanna's former owner was whiter, thinner, resembling more than ever a rare old daguerreotype; but he stood as straight as always, and he still was attired in the broad black hat and frock coat that distinguished him as an Arlington.

"Why, Major!" cried McIvor. "I thought you were in Kentucky. Glad to see you!"

"My compliments to you, suh," said Major Bob, "and Ah have the hono' to request yo' pres-

ence to-night at a ve'y special occasion, an ova-powe'ing occasion, suh! Susanna——"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the bookmaker, and threw one arm about his old friend's shoulders. "I clean forgot the little filly was born at Arlington, and raised under the colors of a gentleman. I see it all now. That's what our young friend meant by sending to Latonia for medicine. Susanna was lovesick for Major Bob, and the Kid guessed it. You've cured her, Major—I can see it in your eye!"

Major Arlington grew very red in the face, and his fingers pulled at his mustache.

"By God, suh!" he exclaimed, "Ah'd give the whole of Vi'ginia if Ah could cure that little filly, but y'all do me too much hono', suh—too *damn* much hono', suh! It's my niggahs that Susanna missed!"

"Niggers?"

"Niggahs, suh—plain, black Vi'ginia niggahs! The same lazy rascals that babied her and petted her and spanked her, since she was old enough to take milk from her mammy. The tho'ough-bred, suh, loves early and nevah fo'gets. Ah am under instructions from our young friend to ask y'all to come down to the stables where Susanna, suh, is being ente'tained by the laziest pack o' niggahs in Fai'fax County."

OH, SUSANNA!

Allah's blessing upon the heads of all True Believers! Major Bob spoke correctly. Not half an hour later McIvor and the last of the Arlingtons were walking toward a barn that bulked between the Torpington and Rockaway stables. Luna was again smiling in the heavens, and McIvor caught the voice of Snowball and the twang of a banjo:

*Oh, Susanna, don't yo' cry foh me.
Ah's come from Alabama,
Wif mah banjo on mah knee!*

In a double stall with only a low partition between the compartments, Susanna munched contentedly at her feed, one ear cocked back to catch the familiar murmur that rose from under a coal-oil lamp not ten feet away.

"Roll dem dice hot, boy; how come you try an' lay 'em down?" . . . Reckon Ah shoots a dollah; showah down, fa'm hands!" . . . "Bam—Big Dick—Eno'mous Richard from Boston, does Ah make it? Ah don't want no change." . . . "Shake 'em dice, boy; how come dey's so quiet?" . . . "Mah Gawd, *snake eyes!* Ah reads ace and deuce—Lady Luck, don' y'all divo'ce me now!"

A lump rose in the throat of And You McIvor. He looked about him for the stage director of

this strange little drama, and presently the Information Kid loomed out of the darkness. There were tired lines in his face, but his eyes were as sharp as ever.

"H'llo, Mac!" he called. "The sails are all set, and we're ready to hoist the anchor. Susanna is back in form, and I'm out on my feet, but—oh, boy! You're going to see a horse race to-morrow!"

McIvor contemplated Dawn o' Virginia's daughter with shrewd eyes, and saw that Susanna was indeed in racing fettle. She was at least fifty pounds heavier. Her delicate forelegs stamped restlessly.

"Who's going to ride?" he asked.

The Information Kid nodded toward a little negro asleep in a corner of the stall.

"Bubbles will have the leg up. He's Snow-ball's boy, eighty-five pounds, and the trickiest little coon in seven counties. He and Susanna drink out of the same bucket. We've promised him a chicken dinner, and a pair of yellow shoes, and I'll tell the cock-eyed world he'll show them other jocks the shortest way to the wire."

"Sir Barry will go out in front and set the pace," said the bookmaker, "and Susanna likes to go out there too; one or the other will crack

under all that weight, and you've got to remember that she's been ailing."

The Kid nodded soberly. "Don't think I ain't been laying awake nights, doping it out. There's a field of ten starters, but it's really only a two-horse race—Susanna and Sir Barry. The filly has the speed and weight of her sex, but the Nixon entry has all the strength, and he's a heart-bustin' brute. With an even break, Susanna will win."

"But she won't get the break," said McIvor.

The Information Kid stared dreamily into purple shadows.

"Oh, I don't know," he mused. "You're forgetting two things: No one is wise that Susanna has been on a thirty-day honeymoon. On the basis of her last performance, she'll be fifty to one in the betting, and no jock will be afraid of her. Second, she's an Arlington horse, and they may be cuckoo, Mac, but give 'em their own way and you'll hear the band playing 'Dear Ol' Virginny.' "

Something of the night's magic crept into the soul of the tall Kentuckian. "You'll want to put a bet on her yourself, I suppose," he said. "Guess you're about stranded. How much do you want?"

The Kid hesitated a moment. "Aw," he dis-

missed, "I've been milking you enough. I don't want no more; no use risking too much."

But that wasn't the real reason, and he admitted it a moment later:

"Major Bob pawned the family silver to bring those coons up here," he explained. "The old guy's sure a sport. Know what I did last week at Grace Arbor? Rubbed horses for Jockey Schreiber and collected the large sum of twenty bucks. Susanna runs for the first honest-to-God bank-roll I've *earned* in four years—twice times ten on her lily white nose, and in Nixon's own book. If that don't put the old oofy-goof on Sir Barry, you can sell me to the undertaker."

McIvor smiled, and said nothing. In his own mind the bookmaker was revolving one of those problems which every follower of the race track encounters—cold logic against a hot hunch, the improbable against the possible, drab conservatism against the sporting chance. Many times the Chesterfield of the betting ring had tossed a hundred thousand dollars into the lap of the gods, and smilingly awaited the verdict; but he was younger then, and reckless of the morrow. It was different now—yet McIvor's nerve was still intact.

Dawn came and brought assurance of fair weather and a fast track. Into Dominion

OH, SUSANNA!

Springs streamed the thousands to witness the renewal of the famous classic, a mile race for three-years-old and up, with twenty thousand dollars to the winner. Under double wraps, Susanna breezed six furlongs and then retired to her stall, to be rubbed and petted by her dusky handlers. She had shown nothing to warrant interest among the railbirds, and the Information Kid—complaining dolorously about a mythical sore throat—barked rudely at Henry the Rat, who sought to question him.

The Kid and Major Bob edged their way into the betting-ring when the first slates were hung up for the Dominion Stakes.

"Thirty to one on Susanna," recorded the Kid. "Sir Barry is favorite, of course—one to two. The odds will lengthen on the filly in a few minutes. Better wait until the very last."

The Major was silent. In his vest pocket was a hundred dollar bill, and it was the sum total of his available wealth.

The Information Kid clutched suddenly at his companion's sleeve. "Pipe what's coming off! Four to five on Sir Barry in McIvor's book. Mac is going to string with Susanna. 'Rah for 'old Kentucky, and now let merry hell break loose!"

The Kid's quick eyes had been the first to see

RIDERS UP!

the Kentucky bookmaker deliberately sponge out that one-to-two price on the favorite, and chalk up odds that were certain to make him a mark for every Sir Barry adherent in the ring. In three minutes the rush toward McIvor's stand was like a scene in the wheat-pit. No other book dared to follow his lead; some of them even marked up one-to-three against the Nixon entry.

"They'll make him take it down," cried the Kid. "He can't stand off that mob!"

But this was one time when the Kid underestimated the handsome gentleman from Kentucky. Over the swirling mass of humanity that eddied around his platform, McIvor's silken voice sounded the challenge that had made him famous:

"Four to five Sir Barry till the bell rings! Forty to fifty Sir Barry—*And You?* Twelve hundred to fifteen hundred—Sir Barry. —*And you?* Forty thousand to fifty thousand—Sir Barry. —*And you?* 'Double it,' the man says and he's on! —*And you?*"

The Information Kid waxed weak in the knees and clung to Major Arlington. "There's your fifty to one on Susanna over in Nixon's book; let's bet our nickels and beat it. I'll tell the cock-eyed world I've seen, at last, a nervier guy than Steve Brodie. It's Mac's bank-roll against theirs, and a million in the pot. *Oh, Susanna!*"

OH, SUSANNA!

Now, by the beard of the Prophet, the conclusion of this story is told from Canada to New Orleans in seventeen versions, all of which are far removed from the truth, because the unexpurgated account is the property of two jockeys, Chick Billington, who rode that day for Nixon, and little Bubbles, who was riding for Susanna and a pair of yellow shoes. Allah guard thy steps! The way of it was this:

When the barrier went up, Susanna broke winging from seventh position, and led the field for the first sixteenth, when Sir Barry moved up alongside to see just how much speed she had. Side by side they raced for another sixteenth, and then little Bubbles looked at the famous Chick Billington. Tears were streaming down the little negro's face.

"White boy," he quavered, "Ah's got mah everlastin' life bet on this fool filly ter finish secon'. There ain't no chance a-tall fer them lizards back there to do nuthin'. White boy, y'all got this heah race in you' hip pocket, but Ah's pinin' ter run secon'. Let me stick along heah, white boy—don' shake me off, er this yer goat will quit. Jes' let me stick wif you' hawss awhile longer."

Chick Billington looked at the little negro astride that fifty-to-one shot. Sir Barry was well

RIDERS UP!

in hand, and his jockey knew what the horse could do. Contemptuously indulgent of the colored apprentice, the older boy permitted his ears to listen to those honeyed words, and the three-quarters was run just one second slower than Nixon's trainer had figured.

On they came, Sir Barry at the rail, Susanna's slim form a chestnut shadow at his right. They swung into the stretch, still in the same position, Billington taking it easy, Bubbles sitting low in the saddle. The tears had mysteriously vanished. The saddling paddock showed up at the right, and the distant murmur of the stands came to them, the sixteenth of a mile away. The pace had been of stake-horse caliber, but Sir Barry's heart-crushing tactics had been deferred, and Susanna's strength was unexpended. The roar from the stands increased:

"Well, so long," said Chick, and spread all sails for the wire.

Snowball's son flung himself forward on Susanna's golden shoulders.

"Good-by, yo'se'f!" he shrieked. "Lay down to it, Susanna!"

Burst of black, charge of chestnut—and Chick Billington knew that the race of his life lay in the next few hundred yards. Hammer and tongs, he went to work—and Sir Barry responded.

OH, SUSANNA!

Susanna's milk-white nostrils bobbed on a line with those of the Canadian king. Her ears flattened back; her stride increased, and the scarlet crept into the whites of the eyes. Little Bubbles was riding with hands and feet, and arms and head—and heart. His voice called forth the final effort.

"Hump yo'se'f, Susanna! Nigger boy on yo' neck, gal! Show 'em white folks how us runs in Kaintuck! Fifty ya'ds and us cashes! Fifty ya'ds, and us dances all night! White boy, Ah's got you! Bam! *And* us makes it!"

Twenty yards from the finish, Dawn o' Virginia's daughter drew clear of the Canadian king; and at the wire, it was Susanna a length, and going away!

A volcanic tempest flew up in stands and betting-ring. McIvor smiled calmly from his platform. The Information Kid vaulted the rail and dashed for the winner's circle. Snowball hurried up the far turn with Susanna's blankets; and little Bubbles, grinning cheerfully, leaned over the filly's shoulders and chuckled:

"'Spects that white boy's goin' bust mah neck, but oh, Susanna, us needs yalla shoes!"

So the sad little Princess danced again, and all hands and the cook danced with her. The revel was still on, when the last race was run, and

McIvor came strolling down to the barn, holding in one hand a slip of paper for which he had just given Bart Nixon twenty-five thousand dollars, and thereby earned that individual's undying enmity.

"Son," said McIvor, taking the Information Kid aside, "I bet on horses; I don't want to own them—not even the best little filly in the world. Here's your chance to go into the game right, and start a stable of your own. Pick out your colors, boy—and I'll stake you to Susanna. Ah, Major—some race, wasn't it?"

Under cover of Major Robert Arlington's approach, the Information Kid lit a cigarette with a trembling hand, and exhaled the smoke through twitching nostrils. His nimble brain reared an Arabian Nights' edifice, and then as quickly tore it down. Owning horses meant feed-bills, jockey-hire, transportation, a thousand and one expenses, and turning his back forever on the freedom that was his as a race track free lance. What could he do with Susanna except sell her? And the little filly had shown into whose keeping she had given her feminine heart. He caught a look of inquiry from McIvor and wig-wagged his answer. Slowly McIvor nodded his comprehension, and the Kid stepped forward.

"Mac and I were just talking, Major, about

Susanna's future. Looks like it would be plain murder to keep her away from home, and I told him that if he wanted to turn her over to you, I figured you could take her back to Kentucky, and pay for her out of the winnings."

"That's it," McIvor corroborated. "I'm no horseman, Major—just took a gambler's chance on the filly. It would be a great favor if you would take her off my hands, and we'll let the sale-price ride. She's paid me handsome to-day."

Major Arlington's eyes swam.

"Suh," he began, and his voice broke. Turning to Snowball, he covered his emotion with energetic waves of a hickory cane.

"Stop yo' grinning, yo' black rascal! Yo' hea' me? Stop it, o' I leave y'all right hea'. Give Susanna the attention that an A'linton ho'se is entitled to, and put her aboa'd the ca's in the mo'ning!"

Late that night the Information Kid, once more in the possession of a bank-roll, and with a railroad ticket in his vest pocket, slipped along the darkened stalls and located Susanna. He produced a bruised tomato, leaned over the half-door and chirruped coaxingly.

Dawn o' Virginia's daughter accepted the gift.

"Guess I won't see you for a little while," said the Kid. "Going home and give the old folks a

RIDERS UP!

chance to bawl me out. Funny li'le world, Susanna—and a guy ain't cuckoo after all just because he gets a kick out of them 'Arabian Nights.' I'll tell the cock-eyed world that stuff is good."

The winner of the Dominion Stakes squashed her gift contentedly. The Kid sighed, and pulling his cap more firmly over his eyes, moved away.

In the darkness Susanna nickered softly.

VII. MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

*In every barn they tell the yarn
From Denver to the Coast,
And every lad reputed bad
Enjoys the story most.
The truth is old as pirates' gold—
The worst may yet arrive
And heroes be—like Runt McGee—
With mud and ninety-five!*

HEARTS AND HOOFBEATS.

“**M**OTHER av God, will ye look at him now!”

Lovin' Reilly, tired of his pasture, was stretching an equine neck over Mrs. Shannon's back fence, and nibbling at the Sunday tablecloth.

The screen door flapped open, and the proprietor of the San Ysidro boarding house, her fat arms a-drip with soap suds, bulged in the opening, one red hand grasping a stick of kindling.

“Reilly, ye dirty limb o' Satan, lave be, or I'll—Saints alive—take *that*, ye bog-trottin' divil!”

The stove wood hurtled through the air just as Lovin' Reilly threw up his head. The sudden

RIDERS UP!

movement qualified Mrs. Shannon as an expert marksman. The bay gelding snorted with pain, scrambled out of range, and looked back reproachfully. From over one eye, blood trickled down a Roman nose.

"'At's a-wingin' him, lady," complimented the Sparrow, "de round is all yourn!"

But Mrs. Shannon emitted a wail of contrition, and went clattering down the stairs.

"Reilly, darlin', forgive me," she shrilled. "'Twas a mistake, d'ye mind? Sparrow, ye grinning monkey, do ye get me a towel 'til I fix his poor eye. Aisy now, me jewel!"

Master Patrick Henry McGee, known sometimes as "Runt" McGee, but more frequently as the Sparrow, secured for his landlady the desired towel, which was promptly plunged in cold water, and then applied, bandage fashion, to the victim's head. Thus equipped, Lovin' Reilly suggested a cross between the Spirit of '76 and an advertisement for headache powders.

"Lady," confided the Sparrow, "if ye takes off one of his swingers now, and parks him on de sidewalk wid some lead pencils——"

"Don't be insultin' yer betters," rebuked Mrs. Shannon, "but at that, he do look almost human. Sure, if he had but a pipe in his mouth now, who else would he be lookin' like but me own husband,

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

and the poor lad dead now these two years come his next birthday. I'm that lonely I could be drownin' this whole blitherin' land wid me tears, and 'tis Judy Shannon that says it!"

The Sparrow grinned cheerfully.

"Don't do nuttin' like dat, lady," he dissuaded. "If yer ever once run in de slop, ye would be pullin' wid us jocks for a fast track. Dere ain't nuttin' worse den mud."

Mrs. Shannon dried her eyes on her apron, cast another maternal glance at Lovin' Reilly, and resumed her place at the washboard.

"True for ye," she grunted, between rubs. "But 'tis nothin' at all do ye know about mud 'til ye stay here av a winter. Glory be, I've seen the slop that thick if ye was to slip on the walk outside, ye'd be after picking yerself up in San Diego tin miles away. Will ye be takin' the tough little face av ye on the road now and boil off a few pounds, or must I be telling your boss?"

"Huh," grunted the Sparrow, "there ain't no jock going to pick up weight on de grub what you hand out. We got stew t'ree times dis week——"

"Ye lie!" said Mrs. Shannon. "'Tis but Tuesday we had hash, and 'tis better than ye deserve. Do ye be doin' yer road work now, and kape away from them pool rooms, or 'tis in the lock-up that ye'll find yerself again. Out wid ye!"

RIDERS UP!

The Sparrow slid off the wash basket, mumbled an oath under his breath, and slouched toward the stairs, pulling a cap savagely over his dark hair. Mrs. Shannon stared at the youngster's sullen shoulders, and rebellious little body.

"Ah, the poor lad," she relented, "Sparrow, do ye wait a minute."

Mrs. Shannon trailed into the corridor, disappeared a moment into the kitchen, and came out with a handful of cookies. "I'm sorry I was hasty wid ye, darlin'," she crooned. "Don't ye be runnin' too hard in the hot sun now, and put these in yer pocket in case the little stomach av ye grows empty before lunch."

"Never mind de bull," said the Sparrow. "If yer wants to help me out, lady, yer kin slip me a coupl'a thin dimes for some smokes. None of dese kids will lend me dough, and my credit ain't as good as it might be. I ain't had a pill since last night."

"Is it cigarettes ye be wantin'?" she cried. "Divil a penny—but wait, I do be rememberin' now that the lad who was sleepin' in number twinty, and who wint away owin' me a week's board, left behind him a dirty collar and seven cigarettes with cork tips—bad luck to him! Do ye wait here."

She returned in a moment bearing a small

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

square box which the Sparrow clutched hungrily.

"T'anks," he acknowledged, "if yer t'inkin' of startin' Lovin' Reilly in de Billionaire Stakes, and yer wants a high-class jock, look me over, lady. I'll ride him free!"

Mrs. Shannon's ample bosom quaked mirthfully.

"Don't be teasin' an ould woman now," she reproached, "and go 'long with ye! Sure, if it wasn't that the furniture was plastered that heavy with mortgages it be crackin' under its own weight, 'tis Lovin' Reilly that would be still tryin' his luck for the sake of poor Danny who nursed him from a bit av a colt on Tiligraph Hill. Did I tell ye there was a dirty Mexican offered me sivinty-five dollars for Reilly, and I busted me broom on the head av him?"

The Sparrow took himself out of range before he voiced his farewell comment.

"Lady, if yer believes me, dat greaser was tryin' ter slip yer some soft dough. If yer sells that horse for more'n six bits Mexican, de cops will be droppin' in to say 'Hello.' "

Mrs. Shannon lunged forward, and the Sparrow fled.

Now, this passage-at-arms between a buxom landlady from County Clare and her diminutive boarder from West T'irty-seventh Street, Town

RIDERS UP!

of the Thousand Tribes, transpired neither in Ireland, New York, Mexico, nor the main highways that lie between. When Uncle Sam drew with his boot the international boundary which separates Baja California from the Golden State, he dropped a shoe button just north of the spot where Aunt Jane used to sell tomares, and the shoe button became San Ysidro. It lies not far from America's "Port of the Sun," and if the yellow man ever grapples with the white, the world will learn a great deal about this region. Until then, by the suffrance of the Mexican authorities, bang-tails circle a mile saucer at Tijuana, and those who follow the thoroughbreds from track to track, may find themselves in much the same predicament as Lovin' Reilly, Mrs. Judy Shannon, and "Runt" McGee, the Sparrow of the turf, all of whom faced in San Ysidro problems of which you shall hear.

When Danny Shannon took the fever and died, he left his widow three corn-cob pipes, \$17.20 and Lovin' Reilly, who had yet to see the inside of the winner's circle, though he had been racing more or less regularly since he was a two-year-old. Danny's widow applied ten dollars to a requiem mass at San Diego, five more to a black bonnet, and expended the balance on a tub and wash-

board with which she ultimately paid the funeral bill.

The following season, Mrs. Shannon began taking in boarders, and before the year was up she had seventeen little jockeys under her maternal wing, and was hovering between Paradise and bankruptcy. "Mother" Shannon, she became, deep of bosom, red of arm, gray hair done in a round knob atop her head. She was like the old woman who lived in a shoe. Distractedly she scolded her children, boxed their ears, fed them, and wept when she accepted their money.

"Sure, 'tis nivar a child of our own did Danny and I have at all, at all," she explained to Rodriguez, the grocer. "Nivar a child unless it be Lovin' Reilly, and I can't be takin' a horse in me arms, d'ye mind? Two sacks of thim potatoes, and I'll see can that boy of Dolan's pay his bill to-morrow."

It happened that Dolan's boy had patronized a craps game and squandered his wages, shouting vainly: "Eight-er from Decatur, 'at's my point!" Mother Shannon barred him from the dining room, and later ran four blocks down the street to fetch him back.

"'Tis foolishness I know," she panted, "but divil a bit can I ate whin there's an impty chair at the table. Sure, unless an angel from hivin

comes to the rescue, 'tis meself and Lovin' Reilly will go over the hill to the poorhouse. Remember that now and take the pig's face av ye into the dining room!"

When Mother Shannon suggested the possibility of an angelic visitation to her neighborhood, she plumbed the depths of improbability. No self-respecting seraph would ever consider San Ysidro for even a one-night stand. The nearest approach to heavenly visitors were the representatives of the Juvenile Court at San Diego, who swooped down on the village occasionally, and sent half its population back to the school-room. On such occasions, it became the custom for every apprentice boy and youthful swipe to claim the protection of Mother Shannon.

"Must sleep ten in a room down there," observed Probation Officer Cook; "how else can a two-story house have seventy-nine occupants? I must look into the matter."

"Faith!" said Mother Shannon, "is it my childer you're afther? Sure I've lost track of the count. 'Tis either sixteen or sivinty-two, and iviry last one of thim is owin' me money. 'Twas but yisterday I renewed the mortgage on the roof over me head, and not a day longer than six months could I get. What with the rheumatism in me back, and nivir a cint in the bureau drawer,

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

'tis only St. Patrick himself knows the answer!"

If the patron saint of Erin knew the solution to Mrs. Shannon's financial riddle he showed no disposition to enlighten his admirer. Instead, there came the Sparrow to irritate Mother Shannon with his impudence; to add to her maternal worry by his misbehavior; to partake freely of her bounty and dodge his board bill; and finally to install himself more or less permanently as the particular pest of the Shannon flock.

He had crawled out of a box car one morning and introduced himself to old Man Hogan at the track:

"I'm de kid wonder of de yards," he admitted, "a champion wid me dukes, and I kin ride like hell! Come in second at Denver with Baby Rose at a hundred to one, outriding Willie Nelson a nose all de way! Maybe you read how I give Kid Smith twenty-eight pounds in 'Frisco, and hung it on his chin in de t'ird roun'? Dey tells me that for t'ree blocks guys was runnin' out on de sidewalk and askin' each other where de house fell down! Look me over, Mister; I kin ride at ninety-five and I pushes 'em or pulls 'em, which ever way yer bets."

That last line cost him a job with Old Man Hogan, but he caught on with Jim Jennison, who was not so particular, and in a week or two he

RIDERS UP!

was booting winners under the wire with fair regularity. Then Jennison put him aboard a "sleeper" with a ton of wise money, and warned him to make good. The Sparrow did his best. He bumped the favorite at the start, rode three boys into the fence, cut sharply across the field at the last turn, and did everything but shoot the last horse that challenged him. He finished in front, but almost every jockey in the race climbed into the judge's stand with a protest, and the Jennison horse was disqualified. The Sparrow got four weeks on the ground and six fights as a result of that performance. He won the fights but lost his job, and therefore fell back upon Mother Shannon, the haven of the hungry and oppressed. During the period of his suspension, he had time to get into more trouble, and tax the patience of Lovin' Reilly's mistress. Only the fact that he was the smallest of all her variegated brood kept the Sparrow from being turned over to the county authorities by his landlady.

"There's thim that's bad," asserted Mother Shannon, "and there's thim that's worse, but, Sparrow darlin', you be that tough ye'd bite the button off the Divil's own tail!"

"Ain't it the trut'?" said the Sparrow complacently. "Tell ye how it was, lady: Me folks tried to make six little gents but dey overreached

themselves. De first of me brudders was O. K., but de rest of us was de bunk. De smaller we was de tougher we come, and lady, yer now lookin' at de family runt!"

Now, the pity of it was that Mother Shannon, with plenty of winning material to choose from, should center her maternal solicitude on such an impossible pair as Lovin' Reilly and Sparrow McGee. In the estimation of the turf, Lovin' Reilly was a "beetle," a "dog," a "lizard," a hundred-to-one shot in a race for snails. He had the heart of a chicken, and the pedigree of a goat, and his record gave him no alibi. Yet Mother Shannon would not have traded him for Man o' War. And as for the Sparrow——

"Wurrah, don't be too hard on him," she pleaded with 'Gene Wolters, who had charge of the special police at the track. "Sure, if Danny hadn't gone and died, we might have had a bye av our own, and he might have been worse than this lad. Don't be reporting him to the stewards, Mister Wolters, and I'll be askin' ye to dinner nixt Sunday. He's the divil's hind hoof, 'tis true, but he's that small 'tis me mother's heart that aches fer him!"

It was not such an unhappy household, after all, that clustered about Mother Shannon in the drowsy drabness of San Ysidro. Willie Heath,

RIDERS UP!

first string jockey for Hopkins, could wrench jazz out of the tin piano that bulked in one corner of the living room. Tony Salazar, fifteen-year-old apprentice boy of Dolan's, had the voice of a meadow-lark, and "Swede" Jensen, who rode for Millionaire Brady, was as skilled with the cornet as he was with dice. There were others, some of them youngsters of good family, who wrote home regularly; some of them, orphans who accepted Mother Shannon's ministrations with mixed emotions. There was much horse-play with newcomers; riotous arguments over the result of each day's races; and extraordinary predictions of what the morrow would bring forth. The Sparrow was responsible for a large part of the profanity and cigarette butts, and almost all of the fights. He stayed out after hours, sneered at those who were well-behaved, and horned his way into every quarrel. He even snarled at Mother Shannon, but this was a privilege he reserved for his own muddy little self. One day, Chuck Connelly invited the landlady to "go take a jump at herself," and the Sparrow, outweighed by fifteen pounds, knocked the Waterford Stable star down the back steps, and put him on the sick-list for a week.

"Who d'hell d'ye t'ink y'are?" he demanded, "handin' out de old raspberry to a lady!"

"G'wan," protested the discomfited Chuck, "I heard you tell her lots worse than that."

"Dat's all right," the Sparrow told him, "dat's all right! De old lady kin stand one of us but no more. If yer get rough wid Missus Shannon, I beats yer t' deat', see?"

The Sparrow's term of suspension ended, and once more he appeared in silks, this time as a free lance, but as cocky as ever.

Meanwhile the hot months burned away, and Mother Shannon toiled on, a worried, clucking hen with an amazing brood of noisy little roosters always getting in her way.

"Sure, it's happy I am at that," she told Special Officer Sweigert. "What, with Lovin' Reilly to nibble at me chin in the evenin's, and all the childer to pester me in the mornin'. But Saints alive! 'tis the bills that are lookin' me in the face now, and the mortgage comin' due. Wan av these days poor old Judy will take Danny's colt, and walk all the way to the county farm to stay forivir among a lot of Mexican naygurs, an' 'twill be only Lovin' Reilly to care. Whist, 'tis after five o'clock and me byes will be comin' home!"

Then came the first rains, heralding the winter months, and bringing to the Shannon household evil days. There were rumors of a legal fight for control of the track, and trouble with the

RIDERS UP!

Mexican authorities. There was even a hint that the meeting might be cut short until the question of ownership was decided. In the face of this unsettled situation, firms which catered to the racing trade refused further credit, and began calling in their loans. The Jockey Club tightened its purse-strings, and owners and trainers quietly laid aside get-away money. For the first time since she had opened her doors to the little "hard-boots" of the track, Mother Shannon found her credit restricted even by Rodriguez, the grocer. Collectors came more and more frequently to her door. One after another, she sought aid from the youngsters she had befriended, but they had learned through bitter experience to look out first for themselves.

"'Tis the end av the world," she told the Sparrow; "wan month from to-day they'll be takin' the clothes off me back an' selling Lovin' Reilly to the butcher. Are ye turnin' Mother Shannon down too, lad? Or can ye spare me the price av a quarter av beef?"

The Sparrow hesitated only a moment. Then his instinct for heroics overpowered him. He reached into a trouser pocket and fished out a ten-dollar bill.

"Here y'are, lady," he said airily, "don't bother wid dem shoestring jocks. Any time yer

wants anything, just say de woid to de Kid Wonder!"

"May the angels dance at your wedding!" shrieked Mother Shannon. "But, Sparrow-darlin'—Glory to God!—can ye spare it?"

"Kin I spare it?" chirped the Sparrow. "Why say, lady, what's ten meggs between friends? Nuttin' at all! Tell yer another t'ing: I was in der parlor de other night when dat guy from de law office was servin' notice on yer; tellin' yer how he was foreclosin' on de joint——"

"Was ye now?"

"Surest t'ing, an' say, lady, was yer ever at de the-ayter?"

"Nivir since me Danny died, God rest his soul!"

"Well, are yer wise to de part where de long lost son comes plowin' home tru' de storm wid all de kale in de woid and helps de old folks t'row de mortgage in de fire?" The Sparrow threw out his chest and tapped himself on the wishbone. "Dat's *me*, lady—I'm de guy what saves the bacon in de last act. All yer got to do is dim de lights an' tip off de orchestra; den I come in like dis—see?"

The Sparrow tripped across the porch after the fashion of a ballet dancer, but, unfortunately for the general effect, one small foot encoun-

RIDERS UP!

tered a smear of soap and he sat down with a crash that shook his teeth. He arose crestfallen, and mindful of more immediate needs.

"Guess yer better slip me a coupla dimes outa dat bill for some smokes," he suggested. "I'll lift yer old mortgage when I get round to it."

The same afternoon the Sparrow blithely essayed the leading rôle in that immortal drama: "Saving the Old Homestead." He had the leg up on Pretty Pauline, a nervous, long-limbed sprinter who was rated a six-to-one shot, in a seven-furlong affair for three-year-olds and up. The mare had been shipped down from Reno and was a lot better than she had shown in her works.

"Slap twenty bucks on her nose for me, will yer, boss?" he said to her owner. "I rides better when I has a ticket in me boot, an' if I lose, yer can take it out of me princely wages."

Pretty Pauline's owner accommodated him, and the Sparrow went to the post figuring in his busy little mind just how he could pyramid his winnings in Mother Shannon's behalf. But he hadn't calculated on having to beat the assistant starter as well as the field.

More things transpire on a race track than are chronicled in the newspapers, and many a race is lost at the start rather than at the finish. "Whip" Sears, who helped Jake Rawlings "get

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

'em away" at the barrier, had his own ideas on the subject of retributive justice. In the past, Runt McGee had broken up many a well-arranged start by wheeling his horse the wrong way in order to prolong the wait, and tire out the heavily burdened favorites. That meant additional work for Sears—more dodging in and out among kicking horses; more yanking at bridles; more snarling and confusion. Sears cursed the Sparrow and bided his time, and his chance came when the Runt appeared on the nervous Pretty Pauline.

It was the one time when the Sparrow was really behaving himself at the post, because the mare was a quick breaker and she had the rail position. But "Whip" Sears first startled her with the lash, and then yanked savagely at the bridle. Just as the rest of the field moved into line, the assistant starter whirled the mare sideways, pretended to straighten her out again, and—as the barrier shot up—he pulled her out of stride. Ten lengths to the good, the favorite led the field past the quarter pole. It was asking too much of any selling plater to overcome that lead, but the Sparrow came so near to performing a miracle that the backers of the favorite would have torn up their tickets, had the wire been fifty yards further. He gave the mare a nice intelli-

RIDERS UP!

gent ride with an amazing finish, and Pretty Pauline just did fail to get up. That was the last race of the day.

The Sparrow shed his gaudy silks, tore up his ticket, dressed and went in search of "Whip" Sears. He located the assistant starter at the paddock, and began hostilities by crowning him with a piece of 3x3 scantling. Then he bit his way out of a clinch, and was industriously kicking his opponent's shins, when a special officer spotted the fracas.

The Sparrow might have saved himself by laying the facts before the stewards and appealing to "Honest Jake" Rawlings to substantiate his claim, but the youngster's code forbade "squealing," and required that he settle his feuds unaided.

"You again, eh?" said the stern Judge Thomas. "Well, I warned you the last time not to be brought before me any more. You're a hoodlum and a disgrace to the sport. License revoked!"

The Sparrow's pert face blanched. He thought of Mother Shannon.

"Yer mean *fer life*, Judge?"

Something in the boy's quavering voice won him a sharp glance from under uplifted eyebrows. Judge Thomas pursed his lips and looked down at the mite of humanity standing before him, cap

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

in hand. Then he recalled that superb finish on Pretty Pauline.

"Hell's fire, no!" he said gruffly, "when you think you've learned your lesson come around and apply for reinstatement. But stay away from the park for three weeks anyway. By that time, we all may have to pull up stakes."

Special Officer Sweigert, six foot one, escorted the Sparrow to the south gate, and expelled him with an admonitory cuff.

"Lucky for you, it wasn't me that was doing it," the officer told him, "or I'd have sent you to jail."

"Aw, go wash yer neck!" suggested the Sparrow, and when he had reached a safe distance, he expressed his further sentiments by throwing rocks. Plodding back to San Ysidro, his shoulders hunched, hands in his pockets, and his feet kicking up the dust resentfully, the smallest of the McGees was perilously close to admitting defeat.

"What chanct has a kid got to be a gent," he mumbled, "when dey let a guy pull de horse right out from under him? Say, ain't it de trut' now? Dey wouldn't a known which way we went, if dat crook hadn't clamped his meal hooks on us. Well, de Kid Wonder was just a nose short a reachin' de golden stairs. T'ree weeks, de Judge

RIDERS UP!

says—and den I has ter lick his boots. Huh!”

Mother Shannon was just shooin another collector off the front steps, when the Sparrow hove in sight.

“Is it yerself, darlin’?” she cried. “Come in the back way, an’ I’ll bolt up all the doors an’ windys. Thim bloodthirsty collectors are that thick, even the chiny-ware ain’t safe. Sure, they’ll be carryin’ off the hot stove with me own dinner on it! Did ye win to-day?”

The Sparrow scowled in the direction of the retreating collector.

“Me foot slipped,” he acknowledged, “but lady, I ain’t t’ru yet. I banged a guy in de snoot, and dey handed me t’ree weeks’ vacation widout pay. Whada ye t’ink a dat?”

This bad news, coming on the heels of her own distress, and the fact that Lovin’ Reilly had only that morning showed symptoms of colic, opened the flood-gates on Mother Shannon’s cataract of sorrow. She collapsed on the steps, threw her apron over her head, and howled. Half a block distant, two mechanics at work in a garage, dropped their tools and sallied out on the sidewalk. The Sparrow was alarmed.

“Nix, nix, lady,” he entreated, “cut it out! Dey’ll t’ink I’m beating ye up.”

This extraordinary suggestion proved effective.

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

Mother Shannon's two hundred pounds gradually achieved an undulating silence, and she looked once more at her diminutive boarder. The down-street audience returned to work.

"Dat's better," complimented the Sparrow, "dat's a lot better. No use ringin' for de morgue 'til somebody's croaked."

"An' who's to kape us alive, darlin'? Tell me that now! It's dead av starvation we'll all be in a week. Nothin' for Lovin' Reilly to ate but a lot of Mexican bananas. 'Tis no wonder he's got the cramps!"

The Sparrow hopped up the steps and patted Mother Shannon's shoulder with the dignity of a floorwalker, and all the sublime assurance of a traffic cop.

"Have no fear, lady," he counselled, "have no fear! Yer under my protection. All yer gotta to is sit back and enjoy de show!"

"The Saints preserve us!" cried Mother Shannon, "will ye listen to what's talkin'! Him that ain't no bigger than a flea. Take a look at Reilly, in the mornin', darlin', and see can ye tell what to do for him."

The next day after breakfast the Sparrow sauntered into the adjoining lot and studied with professional interest the six year old non-winner.

Lovin' Reilly's stomach muscles were twitching

RIDERS UP!

and he looked, if possible, a little more disconsolate than ever.

"Some dog," commented the small veterinarian, "if I was ter show him a sausage, I t'ink he'd bark!"

The Sparrow went back to Mother Shannon and reported his conclusions facetiously:

"Lady, yer friend is afflicted wid de woims. Tell yer what I'll do, just t' show yer me heart's pure gold: I'll take de noble beast fer a workout, an' give him some of dat long grass down by de river."

"God love ye!" said Mother Shannon.

That was how Sparrow McGee and Lovin' Reilly happened to be five miles from home when that November cloudburst put the railroad out of commission for sixteen hours, and converted the vicinity of San Ysidro into a topographical mud pie. The Sparrow headed for shelter when the first huge rain drops pelted down, but the bay gelding had carried him only half a mile, when the road ahead of them melted into a squashy yellow porridge and earth and sky were linked by a sheet of water.

"Hump yerself, old kid," the boy gasped. "In another minute, we'll be neck and neck wid de fishes."

Lovin' Reilly seemed to appreciate the neces-

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

sity for exerting himself. His awkward stride increased, and twin sprays of mud shot up on either side. The Sparrow drummed with his heels on the gelding's ribs.

"Hey, turn yerself loose," he implored.

Whether or not Lovin' Reilly would have responded to this entreaty unaided, the Sparrow was never destined to know. Suddenly, the air was ripped open by a bolt of lightning—and not two hundred yards distant—a scrub oak dropped in a blue flame. A thunder clap like the crack of doom, and Lovin' Reilly jumped twenty feet. He came down on his toes with the bit between his teeth, and in another second the Sparrow's hands and heels and knees were clinging desperately to an equine comet. Three quarters of a mile distant where the road split on a hummock, boy and horse parted company, Lovin' Reilly proceeding straight on, and the Sparrow performing a tail-spin in the general direction of Manuel Garcia's cantaloupe patch.

Being thrown from a horse was no new experience for the Sparrow. He lit in a puddle on his shoulders, rolled over three times and came up, coated with mud but unharmed. Lovin' Reilly was disappearing eastward in a desperate attempt to outrun his shadow.

The Sparrow scrambled across the road, and

RIDERS UP!

into the shelter of a barn. There he sat down on a cultivator, and remained for two hours, rolling one cigarette after another, and consuming them thoughtfully. When the storm had passed, he splashed homeward and discovered that Lovin' Reilly, yellow as a Chinaman, had arrived there considerably in advance of schedule.

"It's an hour I've been on me knees prayin' for the soul av ye!" cried Mother Shannon from the back porch. "In Hivin's name stay out in th' back yard now 'till I turn the hose on ye!"

The Sparrow compromised by disrobing in the basement, and borrowing fresh attire from Tony Salazar. He was singularly mum on the subject of his adventure, so much so that Mother Shannon wanted to give him a physic in the firm belief that he was ill.

"Aw, I'm just *t'inkin'*," he remonstrated. "Can't yer let a guy *t'ink* once in a while?"

After lunch, he wandered to the little barn in the back yard, and undertook another examination of Lovin' Reilly. He ran his hands thoughtfully over the heavy shoulders and quarters, and then looked curiously at the gelding's feet. They were small and compact. Lovin' Reilly's hoofs appeared to interest the Sparrow immensely. Finally, the youngster returned to the house, and borrowed a dope book from "Swede" Jensen. He

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

spent the balance of the afternoon thumbing pages, and analyzing the past performances of an awkward bay gelding that had never known the winner's circle. At length he laid the book aside, rolled a cigarette, and summed up aloud the problem as he saw it.

"De idea is just dis: de old lady has a jack-rabbit dat ain't never won nuthin' better than an argument over oats. All right, I takes him out fer a little breezin', and we gets caught in de world's champion t'understorm. From a fast track, de goin' gets muddy. Den comes a bit of firewoiks, and dis rabbit gets away from de post in one jump. Now de Kid Wonder on his back can judge pace as well as any other jock. We made a half mile in .49, and no guy can tell me different. More than dat, dis skate wasn't weakenin' none, when I last seen him. He had de old tail down fer six furlongs anyway."

The Sparrow mused a moment, and then continued his soliloquy: "Dat plug never enjoyed himself 'til de lightnin' come; dat means he likes ter finish under der whip. But dey've used the bat on him before, so dat ain't de only t'ing. Well den we look around some more, and we get wise to de fac' dat dis dog runs on de old toes; dat means he don't slip in de slop, but it hurts him to run on a hard track. Den we sees he has

RIDERS UP!

small hoofs; dat means he don't pick up de mud; and, bein' a dog, he don't quit so quick when de Runt is ridin' him widout a pound a lead in de saddle. Wot's de answer? Yer had it right de foist time: *Mud an' ninety-five pounds*. Go to de head a yer class, Kid—yer a wonder!"

A rainbow of hope chased all the gloom from the Sparrow's sullen little face, but in another moment the clouds reappeared, for he recalled that he was both broke and barred from the track.

"Ain't dat always de way?" he sighed. "Here I has a swell idea for helpin' a lady in distress, and me entry is declined. If it was rainin' dollars, I'd get bot' eyes put out wid de first two drops. But I ain't t'ru yet; de Kid Marvel is still in de runnin'."

Despite the Sparrow's unwavering faith in himself, the ensuing fortnight marked the decline of the Shannon prospects into the bottomless pit of despair. The Tijuana Jockey Club announced that the meeting would close shortly until the question of ownership had been decided. The big stables began to move out, and Mother Shannon's boarders, one after another, took their belongings out of reach of the sheriff. The Sparrow made no comment, but every afternoon, he saddled Lovin' Reilly and disappeared in the direction of the muddy road that paralleled the river. He came

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

back one evening to learn that a judgment had been secured against his landlady, and a writ of attachment on her remaining belongings was about to be issued. The same night he went to San Diego, and located Judge Thomas at the Grant Hotel.

"Yer told me t' come back, Judge, when I was ready t' kiss de flag," he reminded, "Well, I'm here. If yer lets me off de ground just onct, before de meetin' blows, I gives yer me woid I won't never start no more roughhouses."

Judge Thomas rubbed his chin reflectively.

"Who are you riding for, my boy?"

The Sparrow hesitated. "I was t'inkin' of takin' a mount for a lady friend what's outa luck," he confessed. "Be a sport, Judge, an' take a chanct wid me, will yer? Honest t' God, I'll do de right t'ing, and I ain't never said dat before. I——"

The Sparrow's plea was interrupted by a spell of violent coughing.

"All right," said Judge Thomas, "I'll see that you're given one more chance, but you've got a pretty bad cold, my boy. You shouldn't go running around in this rain. Better go home now and go to bed. Where are you living?"

"At Missus Shannon's. De old lady's down

RIDERS UP!

and out, Judge—they're gonna take de furniture away in a coupla days."

"Too bad," commiserated Judge Thomas. "Danny's widow, isn't it? Gold Harp on a green field,—I remember the colors. What became of that old hound they brought down here?"

"Yer mean Lovin' Reilly?" said the Sparrow, slowly. "Why, he's been in de ol' pickle vat waitin' for a wise guy t' come along and dig him up. Judge, if it's rainin' Tuesday, kin I bring him out?"

Judge Thomas' shoulders twitched with suppressed merriment. "Good Lord!" he commented. "Oh, all right, let the old lady have her way. I suppose she'll get a kick out of seein' the colors again. But look here, Kid—you'd better take care of that cold."

"T'anks," said the Sparrow. "As soon as I performs me duty, I'll be all right."

Two days later, he discovered in the overnight entries that which he sought—a six furlong selling race for three-year-olds and up. The claiming price was set at five hundred dollars and the assigned weights were seventeen pounds below the scale. That meant 105 pounds for a six-year-old gelding. It was still too much of an impost, and the Sparrow did a rapid bit of thinking. Then he recalled that in a race of this kind, he was en-

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

titled to five pounds off for each one hundred dollars below the specified valuation. Thereupon he entered Lovin' Reilly, with a sale price against him of only three hundred dollars, and thus achieved the desired weight of ninety-five pounds.

"Nobody'd claim dat dog for six-bits," he reasoned. "If we comes down in front, every guy what's got any dough will drop dead. Well, de orchestra is all set, and de blue lights is comin' on. To-morrow I comes prancin' home wid de beans, or de show is a flivver."

But Mother Shannon, ignorant entirely of the Sparrow's ambitious plans, heard the boy coughing all through the night, and she padded into his room at six o'clock in the morning to find his teeth chattering, and his forehead hot to the touch.

"Holy Mother!" she cried, "keep under the covers now, 'til I run out for th' docter!"

"Docter, hell!" chattered the Sparrow, "I gotta date wid Reilly over at the track dis afternoon, and if dis rain keeps up, don't let nobody tell yer I ain't gonna be there!"

"Hould yer tongue!" shrilled Mother Shannon. "Niver a foot d'ye put out av the bed all day, even if it's Judy Shannon that has to be sittin' on the chest av ye. Niver wan foot—mind that, now!"

RIDERS UP!

The Sparrow groaned and made no further attempt to debate the matter. He submitted to the doctor's examination in sullen silence, and with the stoicism of a martyr permitted Mother Shannon to apply a mustard plaster to his chest. Later in the morning, he was resting so quietly that the landlady deemed it safe to ride in to San Diego and see if she could obtain two dollars and a half on the coral brooch that had been in the family for a century. It was the only way she knew of securing the medicine the doctor had ordered. But, first, suspicious of the Sparrow as the result of long experience, she took all his clothes and locked them in her room, making sure that every garment in the house was under lock and key before she left.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon, with the rain falling harder than ever, when Mrs. Shannon returned. In the downstairs hall she encountered a figure in a nightgown. It was not the Sparrow.

"Is it you, Willie Cunningham?" she cried. "Heaven take us! Aren't ye ashamed to be trapezing around this time a-day like that. 'Tis an ondacint child——"

"Say," interrupted Willie, "I'm not rigged out like this for fun. The Sparrow knocked me down and swiped all my duds and two dollars. What's

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

the big idea of locking all the rooms? Is the joint pinched?"

Mother Shannon disdained reply. She was already puffing up the stairs to confirm with her own eyes the implication that the Sparrow was gone. When she returned she was out of both breath and imprecations.

"Willie Cunningham, tell me where he wint, or I'll wring the ears av ye clane off!"

Willie was too angry to be choice in his language.

"Where the hell do you think he went? Ain't he down to ride Lovin' Reilly in the third race, and didn't I tell you he wrassled my clothes off, and hooked the last two bones I had in the world? Get me some clothes out of Tony's room, and I'll sic' the cops on the little stinker."

Mother Shannon collapsed into a rocker, and wrung her hands in an ecstasy of alarm. Finally, she managed to stagger desperately to her feet and to seize her umbrella and shawl. She threw a key at the scantily-clad figure in front of her.

"Jump into some clothes, lad—and run down to the store. See can yer get Father Donovan on the tiliphone, and thin the doctor. Quick darlin' or I'll brain ye!"

Willie clutched the key.

"Where *you* goin'?" he demanded.

RIDERS UP!

Mother Shannon's trembling fingers were busy with her bonnet. "Where ilse should I go," she wailed, "but after my own darlin' lad who's out av his head wid the fever? Lovin' Reilly too, ye say? Oh, God be merciful! An' I pawned me brooch fer medicine! Run, ye little divil!"

A jitney bus, ploughing through mud and rain, deposited Mother Shannon at Tijuana, half an hour later. She had not the price of admission, but by the simple expedient of walloping a ticket collector over the head with her umbrella, she attracted first the attention and then the sympathy of Chief Special Officer 'Gene Wolters.

"Come right along with me, Mrs. Shannon," he invited. "Out of his head with fever, you say? Well, we'll go right over to the jockey room, and pick him up!"

Through a forest of umbrellas and raincoats, the owner of Lovin' Reilly elbowed her way in the wake of the officer, only to find that horses and riders for the third race had already been called to the paddock. Thither they turned, worming a wet trail through thousands of spectators who were seeking shelter from the storm. Once more, they were too late. Before they had reached the sawdust enclosure, a bugle sounded the call to post, and a string of eight horses splashed out into the mud, their riders bending their heads against

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

the scourging rain. Mrs. Shannon lowered her umbrella and plunged toward the railing. Last in the vanishing procession, she made out a bay horse, and a midget wearing a faded green blouse with a gold harp embroidered on the shoulders.

"Come back here, ye little divil!" she shrilled. "Sparrow, darlin'—*Sparrow!* Oh, Mother of God, he's past hearin' me!"

'Gene Wolters clutched Mother Shannon's arm and dragged her back under cover.

"Come up here by the finish," he directed. "They'll be back in a minute, and then I'll grab him for you. No use us getting pneumonia, too. I should have known the boy was out of his head, taking a mount on a six-year-old maiden. Right in here, lady—this is as good a place as any."

They edged their way into the crowd gathered below the official press stand. In front of them, a huge bed of umbrellas stretched to the rail. Beyond lay the track, with the infield a miniature lake, and the back stretch almost hidden by the storm.

"Won't be long before I have that kid by the collar," soothed the officer.

"Hould yer tongue!" rebuked Mother Shannon. "'Tis only me prayers that can help him now!"

With a faded shawl drawn over her bonnet and

RIDERS UP!

pinned securely under her generous chin, the dispossessed proprietor of the San Ysidro boarding house turned her face to the sky. Her lips moved in a plea for the safe delivery of Lovin' Reilly and the Sparrow.

Five minutes passed, with the silent thousands staring off into the rain at a squirming, twisting nest of horseflesh opposite the quarter pole. A confused shout arose from those nearest the railing.

"They're off!" said Officer Wolters.

Mother Shannon gave no heed. Her maternal heart was vibrating in a far different cause. On the wind-swept, gray horizon, a blur of muddy dots swept onward, stringing out and then bunching again, like birds before the hunter. One after another, the quarter poles were negotiated, and then the far turn brought its hush of suspense to the waiting multitude. Then the murmur rose, and pulses began to quicken.

A beefy-faced individual mounted on a cracker box, wiped his glasses, and elevated them.

"They're into the stretch," he reported. "Gosh, they're all the same color today, boys; it would take a better man than me to call 'em! Gee-rusalem! What's that finishing under the whip?"

"Captain Ace," said a betting commissioner. "They're going to get him, too! He'll dog it

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

when he hits the paddock. There's your winner on the outside. Secret Silver cashes!"

Through the gray curtain of storm, the field burst into view, and the gathered thousands gave tongue. Plastered with mud, one horse was desperately leading the way. A scant length behind, two others were coming up fast, one on the rail, the other on the outside. They challenged the leader at the saddling paddock, and for a margin of seconds, it was a toss-up, with pandemonium in the stands. Then the confused shouting merged into a spontaneous tribute to the boy on Captain Ace. Never since the days of Snapper Garrison had a racing crowd beheld such harmony of heels and whip and arms and knees. It was ding-dong, hammer and tongs, hell and lather. Twenty yards, and the leader still held to his scant advantage, another twenty—and the rail horse fell back beaten. Then the remaining challenger gave it up. A huge heavy-shouldered brute, yellow with mud, came floundering on, his hooded head bobbing in harmony with the ninety-five pound demon who rode him.

A vocal blast of astonishment smote the air. The beefy-faced man howled at his nearest neighbor:

"Captain Ace don't run in blinkers— Who the hell?"

RIDERS UP!

But Officer Wolters caught both the saddle number of the winner, as he shot under the wire, and the incredulous yells from upstairs. He came to life with the bellow of a bull, and reached for Mother Shannon. Roughly, he interrupted the litany.

"This way to the winner's circle," he roared. "Lovin' Reilly and Sparrow McGee—all by themselves! This way, lady—this way! Get out of our road, everybody!"

And Mother Shannon, hysterically uncertain of what it was all about, fought her way to the gate that leads on to the track,—and when the Sparrow's muddy, feverish little body had been weighed by the clerk of the scales, and the victory approved—took the lad in her own red arms—and even Judge Thomas descended from his stand to investigate all the excitement.

This explains how Mother Shannon, accompanied by the official club physician, and Officer Wolters, came to be driven home in Judge Thomas' limousine with a delirious youngster still in jockey attire. Father Donovan was already there, and he helped to calm the troubled soul of Judy Shannon by adding spiritual ministrations to the combined skill of two very good physicians.

There is but one thing further to record. Being

MUD AND NINETY-FIVE

wise to the way of jockeys, Chief Special Officer Wolters looked in the muddy right boot of the invalid, and discovered a green and white slip of cardboard, which proved to be the only ticket purchased on Lovin' Reilly, and therefore it drew down the entire pool of four thousand and five dollars and twenty-two cents. The \$5.22 eventually went to Willie Cunningham, which was no more than fair. But, as to the balance, you must inquire at the boarding house in San Ysidro, now operated very successfully by the firm of "Mother Shannon & Son."

VIII. THOROUGHBREDS

IN the lexicon of the race track, "speed" and "class" are the fundamental concepts. *Speed* expresses the oldest instinct of the human race, the insatiable longing to conquer distance; *class* goes back still further, standing for that precious quality which enabled the first pollywog to wiggle out of the Mesozoic slime. Throughout the ages, the formula has remained unchanged; speed plus class marks the thoroughbred.

Measured by either standard, swiftness of foot or grace of breeding, excellence found its supreme expression in Viva Reina, silken-coated, soft-eyed queen of the American turf. No better loved mare ever looked through a bridle than the four-year-old daughter of Old Dominion out of Empress Lou. One glance at the graceful figure stepping into the sunshine from the paddock entrance and leading the way towards the barrier, and every one understood that here indeed was the quintessence of lineage.

The eternal fitness of things ordained that there should be braided in the mane of Viva

THOROUGHBREDS

Reina the silver and purple of the Van Buren stables, for here was a family as substantial as Manhattan itself. Then, too, Billy Van Buren, the actual owner of Viva Reina, was in many respects a remarkable young man.

In his college days the younger Van Buren was guilty of so many escapades that his father, old Drexel Van Buren, was forever taking some distinguished personage aside and whispering apologetically in his ear: "You know, Billy is an unutterable ass, but—" And so forth.

The "unutterable ass" displayed an extraordinary facility for doing everything well that was not worth doing at all. He could mix the best cocktails, tell the best stories, and travel faster in a football suit than any other man in the history of Nassau. In his senior year he broke an ankle against a Harvard goal post and thereafter his obsession for speed took the form of racing-cars and other means of mechanical locomotion.

When the war came, Billy Van Buren chucked everything and went to France. His ankle was still a bit stiff, but it did not prevent him from piloting a car that bore the insignia of the General Staff and was superior to all traffic regulations. Later he entered the air service, and when America joined the fray, was transferred to his own

RIDERS UP!

forces, rose to command of a combat squadron, and his name became familiar to the breakfast-tables of his native land.

When he came back, bronzed and beribboned, it was to find his father a financial colossus but still the same old doting "Governor." Like two boys they talked over their respective exploits and their future plans. Billy Van Buren's thrilling narrative, intended solely for his father's ears, lasted five hours. Drexel Van Buren told *his* story in fifteen minutes.

"The old firm's grown a bit, Billy. I had contracts for ten bottoms at sixty-eight dollars a ton when the war broke out. Cleaned up a million and a half on each contract almost overnight. Sold five ships and put seven and a half millions into the South American end of the business. Caught the market right on sugar—another five millions. Now we've got three millions in Liberties, ten ships worth one hundred and eighty dollars a ton, a warehouse valued at two million, and we're cutting into the British trade from one end of the south coast to the other. Billy, my boy, you've been through hell, now I want you to have your share of fun. Forty millions in assets, and I rolled it up all for you. Help yourself, boy—hit 'em hard and high, the old man loves you!"

THOROUGHBREDS

So the younger Van Buren set out to realize his boyhood dreams. He placed orders for the fastest plane, the swiftest motorboat, the speediest racing car that money and American ingenuity could produce. He imported a string of polo ponies, bought one of the most celebrated racing stables in America, and established an amazing stock-farm in the Berkshires. Sport became his world, and speed his lodestar.

One after another, trophies and records fell before the onslaught of Billy Van Buren, and finally there appeared Viva Reina, slender and aristocratic, to carry the purple and silver in the classics of the turf and to assume her place as the queen of American thoroughbreds.

The mare was purchased from Tod Pennington at a figure that set a new record in racing annals. With her, under a two-year contract, went Sandy McKee, as good a trainer as ever breathed the air of the stables. From the taciturn but sentimental Scotchman young Van Buren absorbed respect and admiration for horseflesh, qualities that were intensified with each triumph of Viva Reina, until the gallant mare represented to her owner almost, but not quite, the most desirable possession in the world.

The god of romance is a fine stage director. Van Buren met Peggy Sheridan at the Madison

RIDERS UP!

Square Horse Show—under circumstances that impressed the event forcibly on his mind. He was rather hopeful of a clean sweep in the gaited saddle class, but the moment the spot-light disclosed the final challenger, Van Buren drew a quick breath and acknowledged himself beaten.

None but Peggy Sheridan could have achieved that effect and not made it patently theatrical. On the back of her own entry, the milk-hued King of Araby, the heiress to the Sheridan millions rode into the ring, her short dark curls bobbing over a white shirt, open at the throat, and boyish white breeches carrying out the symphony.

Van Buren did not wait for any verdict from the judges' stand. He rushed to one of the floral booths in the lobby, bought all the roses in sight, and trailed by a dozen pages, made his way back to the ring.

It was one of the pretty features of the night, and he climaxed the presentation by handing up to Peggy Sheridan the little morocco case, in which he was accustomed to carry the silver wings that surmounted his flying colors.

"*Gage d'honneur*," he explained. "I'd be awfully happy if you'd take it. I love thoroughbreds, you know; and Jove—I've never seen a more wonderful pair!"

It was a graceful thing to do, and Peggy Sheri-

THOROUGHBREDS

dan met it gracefully. She slipped to the ground, dark eyes dancing, and extended her hand impulsively.

"There may be a question about the horse, Mr. Van Buren, but when it comes to sportsmanship, no one will ever take your honors away." She brushed back her curls in a military salute.

And then the flashlight photographers let go, and fortunate newspapermen who had caught the general drift of the conversation made hurried notes to be "fluffed up" later as first-page material.

Those flashlight pictures, captioned in breezy fashion, and syndicated all over the country by enterprising news-services, caused a perceptible buzzing around the tea-tables of society.

The daughter of Senator Sheridan was worth several millions in her own name. People recalled her game-hunting exploits in Africa, her passion for fanciful costumes and extraordinary pets, her athletic prowess, her celebrated million-a-minute Red Cross speech in Wall Street, and her apparent ambition to make every one else dizzy, so what more natural than that she should marry Billy Van Buren, the American speed-prince?

"And then, they're both of such splendid fami-

RIDERS UP!

lies," argued Society, "and so temperamentally alike—rather high-steppers."

More and more they were seen in each other's company. While their interests paralleled, a sort of *entente cordiale* developed which eliminated competition. If Peggy Sheridan entered her bull terriers in the Knickerbocker Kennel Show, Van Buren kept his at home and sought top honors in the Airedale class. Between them, they made pretty much of a clean-up in the National Coursing Stakes and the North American Field Trials. Flying in the New York-Baltimore Sweepstakes, Van Buren registered the lowest elapsed time; and Peggy Sheridan's yacht defended its honors successfully in the Newport Regatta.

All these activities were viewed complacently by the elect, but when interest was at its height, the pendulum which operates by the law of averages reached the turning point in the arc of abnormal prosperity and began the downward swing along the path of inevitable reckoning. Farsighted business men sought financial storm-cellars; small bubbles burst, and then larger ones; foreign trade became demoralized, Wall Street uneasy; and the current of readjustment became a millrace.

Old Drexel Van Buren struggled manfully to keep his head above the flood, but many a younger

THOROUGHBREDS

and stronger man than he found himself facing a receivership.

There was nothing mystifying about the threatened collapse of the Van Buren interests. Expanding its operations, the firm had bought heavily on the market sugar and coffee on consignment, and had sold on bill-of-lading two shiploads of rice. To accomplish this, the elder Van Buren had hypothecated the firm's bonds and borrowed seven and a half million from New York banks.

With the break of the market, Van Buren and Company stood to lose six million in sugar and coffee and another three million when their rice was declined by the consignee. The value of bottoms dropped almost as speedily as it had risen; and one after another, holders of the firm's securities became alarmed, and creditor banks, under instructions from the Federal Reserve authorities, began calling their loans. Meanwhile, Billy Van Buren pursued his way blissfully along the pathway of the speed-burners. . . .

Duncan Cartwright, family counselor, located Billy one morning at the latter's club. In his hand the lawyer carried a morning paper which published on the financial page a thinly veiled reference to the financial embarrassment of one of the city's oldest and most reliable firms. Van Buren

RIDERS UP!

was at breakfast, and he waved Cartwright to a chair beside him.

The attorney accepted the invitation and then opened the paper to the market news. "Read that," he said soberly. "I want you to attend a conference in my office this afternoon. We're on the rocks, you know, and there may be something you can do, though I don't imagine what."

Van Buren grinned cheerfully. "You're frank, aren't you? Of course there isn't anything I can do, and you've picked out a rotten day for a conference; I can't possibly attend. Read that." He tossed over a night telegram, and Cartwright adjusted his glasses gravely. This is what he read:

"Pancake burning. Coffee clear. Rambled thirty-nine. Table set for you.—Head Waiter."

At the attorney's grunt of protest, Van Buren looked up quickly and then laughed in sudden comprehension of the joke.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed. "I forgot that it was in code. The message is from Sandy McKee, my trainer at Saratoga, and it refers to Viva Reina. Here, I'll decipher it: *'Weather clear, track fast, Viva Reina breezed a mile in one minute and thirty-nine seconds and is ready to win for you. Signed: McKee.'* That means," he explained, "that Sandy McKee figures

THOROUGHBREDS

the mare will capture the Saratoga Stakes to-day and thus prove herself ready for the International Derby at Belmont. Of course, I'm going to watch her run; so you see I can't very well attend your conference."

Cartwright consulted his watch. "You don't mean that you figure on being in Saratoga this afternoon?" he questioned.

"Of course I do," Van Buren answered. "Come along with me. I'm going to hop off in about an hour. I can cut train time in half, you know, and I'll get you back in New York in plenty of time for dinner; how's that hit you?"

The lawyer's, "No, thank you," was uttered with emphasis.

"How about to-morrow?" he inquired.

"Worse," said Van Buren. "I'm booked to start from scratch in the Long Island Motorboat Handicap, and I wouldn't miss it for the world."

"Humph! Well, let's make it the following day."

The younger man shook his head. "You're forgetting the International Polo Match, and after that there are the auto races in Florida——"

Cartwright controlled himself with a very great effort.

"My dear young man," he protested, "my *very* dear young man! Is it possible that you do not

RIDERS UP!

comprehend that your father is facing bankruptcy, that this country is confronting the greatest industrial crisis in fifty years, that——”

Billy Van Buren suddenly interrupted, tossing aside his napkin and leaning confidentially across the table.

“Cartwright,” he said, “let’s come to an understanding.”

“Precisely,” agreed the lawyer. “That’s what I’m here for.”

“Well, then,” Van Buren pursued, “here it is: I have at the present time all the money I want, and it’s invested in the things that I like. No man can touch my personal fortune, and I figure that it is sufficient to care for Dad and myself in a perfectly befitting manner. Now, if the firm goes to the bow-wows, as you seem to think it will do, I’ll be damn’ well pleased, for it’s the only way I’ll ever get the Governor to step out of the harness and live like a gentleman. He will never quit unless he is made to, and I certainly have no intention of trying to perpetuate a business that would compel me to give up the things in life that I consider worth while. Now, you’ll excuse me, won’t you, if I hurry off to the field?”

Very red in the face, Attorney Duncan Cartwright arose and bowed to the younger man in

THOROUGHBREDS

a manner dignified and courtly, as became an ex-Senator of the United States.

"I wish you *bon voyage* and success in your chosen field of effort," he said. "Pray do not let me detain you."

An hour later the special Curtiss-Blauvelt, a mile high in the sunlight, was following the trail of the river. Nor was Billy Van Buren alone. His eleventh-hour inspiration had its reward. In front of the pilot's seat was the hooded and jacketed figure of Peggy Sheridan.

They made a perfect landing in the center of the track itself, and later watched Viva Reina romp home in the rich Saratoga Stakes, leading a gallant field by two lengths. Van Buren had wagered one hundred thousand on the mare's chances, at one to four, but he was jubilant for other reasons. . . .

The International Derby was a new event, establishing the supreme classic in the racing annals of the world. It provided one hundred thousand dollars and a gold trophy to the winner and was open only to four-year-olds which, in the preceding season, had captured the three most important events in their respective countries. Viva Reina's impressive victory that day showed that she was ready to uphold American honors

RIDERS UP!

in the epochal thoroughbred test now but a few days distant.

Van Buren and his guest took the air again as soon as the fifth race was over and began the homeward flight. It was a perfect day for flying, redolent with the charm of late autumn, and Van Buren's reflections were in harmony with his surroundings. He was young: he was independently wealthy; he had just seen the purple and silver cheered by twenty-five thousand people; Peggy Sheridan was in front of him; and the earth lay below them—a colorful mosaic. He shut off the motor, and they drifted through soundless space with nothing to indicate that they were moving at all.

He leaned forward. "Great, isn't it?"

The girl looked back and nodded dreamily.

Yielding to impulse as usual, Van Buren spoke again:

"Let's team it together, Peggy, always. I'm crazy about you and lonely as the devil. I——"

"Billy Van Buren!" exclaimed Miss Sheridan.

"Are you proposing?"

"I'm trying to," he acknowledged cheerfully.

"It's my maiden effort, so you'll have to make allowances."

The answer was a laugh of silver. The daughter of Senator Sheridan contemplated her com-

THOROUGHBREDS

panion a moment and then directed a calm glance at the earth beneath them.

"I suppose if I say no, you'll go into a tail-spin," she observed. "Do start the engine up, Billy, and give me a chance to think it over."

Immediately the roar of the motor precluded further conversation as the gray 'plane sped toward Manhattan. The speed at which they made the return trip indicated Van Buren's eagerness to learn his fate. Just as the long day was fading, they circled over the landing-field and then swooped gracefully down, coming to rest as a number of overalled figures hastened to meet them.

Van Buren led the way to his racing car, tucked his companion in, then took his seat at the wheel.

When they were well on their way downtown, Peggy Sheridan of her own accord broke the silence.

"You're a dear boy, Billy, and I'm not at all sure that I don't love you; but there are three perfectly good reasons why I won't marry you."

Van Buren kept his eyes on the stream of traffic ahead. "Do you mind listing the reasons?" he asked.

"Not at all," she responded. "First, everybody would say that you have added another souvenir to your collection, and that's just about

RIDERS UP!

it; I'd be of no more use to you than any other trophy of the chase. Second, you hold one-half the prize-winners in the country, and I control the balance. If we married, it would be a combination in restraint of trade, and we'd be rightfully prosecuted. Third,"—she checked the figure off on a slim white finger—"and this is the serious one, Billy, the man I marry must show something else besides speed."

"Something besides speed?"

"Yes," she affirmed, "speed plus a certain quality that not even Kipling could define. You know how he puts it:

*If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them "Hold on!"*

"That's the quality I mean, Billy. Speed is just a matter of mere mechanics or muscles, unless it is backed by the other."

"And I haven't got it—the other?" Van Buren put the question quietly.

"I don't know," she responded. "I suppose you have, or you would never have done those wonderful things in France. But the war is over now, and you are the American Speed King, with no other occupation than collecting cups and rib-

bons. Of course, I'm doing much the same thing; in fact, we're so nearly alike that it's silly; but what's forgiven in a woman is sometimes regarded differently in a man. Am I making myself clear, Billy?"

Van Buren grinned ruefully. "You're doing splendid, my dear," he commented. "You're willing to admit that I'm a speed-burner, but you question my ability to carry weight and go a distance on a heavy track."

"No," she contradicted, "it isn't that at all. I think you have the ability, but the circumstances are such that it is not required of you, and hence, speed is sufficient for your purposes. Outside of a good husband, speed meets all my requirements too; so let's forget it, Billy, and continue to be just good friends."

Van Buren was a game loser. As they turned into Riverside Drive, he stopped the car a moment at a corner florist's, excused himself and returned a moment later with an enormous bouquet of her favorite Irish Fireflame roses.

"Don't count me out of the running yet," he pleaded. "It's rather hard to have my horses and dogs win every event, and to come a cropper in my own start. You'll suspend judgment, won't you, while I try to find out what's wrong with me?"

Peggy Sheridan buried her face in the flowers, and they alone heard her reply. Van Buren was watching the traffic-signal, or he might have detected the effect produced by his last speech and have pressed his advantage. But the golden moment slipped by, and, when he again stole a glance at his companion, she was gazing dreamily into space.

When they parted company at the Sheridan mansion, Van Buren went home, and later that night in the library of his own residence encountered a second problem. He found his father seated before a log fire, his gaunt form clad in evening clothes, outlined against the crimson plush of the luxurious armchair. The elder Van Buren had the appearance of a man whose body had been broken on the rack and then flung aside as wreckage. His son's eyes widened in quick concern.

"Why, Governor!" he exclaimed. "Why, Governor—what's happened?"

Drexel Van Buren continued his silent contemplation of the dancing flames. The younger man's thoughts raced back to his conversation that morning with Lawyer Cartwright, and he thought he understood.

He put an affectionate arm around his father's shoulders. "Don't take it too hard, Dad," he

urged. "You've done your bit and earned a rest. I've got enough to take care of us both. Let the business go hang, and you and I will have a good time together."

Van Buren Senior patted his son's hand and smiled wistfully. "You're going to take care of me, eh, Billy? You're a fine boy—a splendid chap; but I'm afraid you don't quite understand about things."

"No?"

"No." Then after a moment Drexel Van Buren spoke again:

"Of course, we can't all be heroes. You had a golden chance, and you made the most of it. I'm mighty proud of you. With me, it's been heavy going all my life, plodding along through the mud to make a success of the business my father and my father's father created and carried on. It's a good deal like a race, you know. The test comes in the stretch, as you've often pointed out, and I would like to have finished a winner. Once I could have stood the gaff, could have met the challenge; but I'm no longer young, Billy; they're too strong for me. But it goes against the grain to quit when the wire is in sight; that's what *hurts*."

"Just how bad is it, Governor?" Van Buren Junior inquired quietly.

RIDERS UP!

"We need about seven million in cash to see us through. Dalrymple went over to the Pan-Atlantic people Tuesday, and that precipitated matters. As general manager the banks believed he would have been able to pull us out of the hole. They think I'm too old to weather the storm, and I guess they're right."

Billy Van Buren paced up and down the long room.

The elder man roused himself and strove to square his shoulders. "I don't want you to make any sacrifice, Billy—you're young, and you're blooded; you're a good, clean sportsman, and that's a royal profession. They've given me ten days in which to fight off a receivership. Perhaps something will turn up in the meantime; if not—I'll become the father of America's Speed King; that ought to be honor enough for an old man, eh, Billy? Let's go to bed, son. . . ."

The only thing that developed in the tangled affairs of the Van Buren family during the next few days was the International Derby, set for Belmont Park on the day before Drexel Van Buren was required to face his creditors in the final showdown.

The approach of this extraordinary event threw into partial eclipse the nation's political and industrial problems, enabled sporting writers

THOROUGHBREDS

to break into the front pages of even the most conservative dailies, and developed such a storm of controversy and conjecture that Billy Van Buren had time to think of nothing else.

Admitting that Viva Reina was undoubtedly the queen of the American turf, ninety out of every one hundred horsemen bewailed the fact that a mare should be compelled to defend the national colors against five supreme contestants of the opposite sex.

As every turf-expert knows, endurance and stamina in the last analysis are the prerogatives of the male. The daughter of Old Dominion had already shattered one tradition, which held that a mare could never win a Derby; but when it came to asking her to defeat the combined attack of Brighthurst, the English superhorse; St. Egwin, the Canadian crack; the French stallion Beau Monde; Don Pedro, out of the royal stables at Madrid; and the Argentine entry Rio Norte—even the most sanguine followers of the silver and purple appreciated that the test was unparalleled in race-track history. Following their three-year-old season, every entrant had been shipped to America to become acclimated, and though they had never been called upon to face one another, each had won sufficiently important events to indicate that in speed and performance

RIDERS UP!

they were well matched. Meeting now as four-year-olds, and for the first time, they were fully entitled to the extraordinary attention they received.

Billy Van Buren sought comfort from Sandy McKee.

"Oh, aye," said the grizzled Scot, "'twill be a terrible struggle, but the Queen will do what we ask of her. The only question is, should we ask it?"

"We have to," answered Van Buren. "She's the only one qualified to start in the American colors."

"Well, then," said McKee simply, "she'll win." And it was with this understanding that when the great day came, Viva Reina—one hundred and twenty-one pounds on her back, her mane plaited with silver and purple, and trembling in every bronze-gold limb—was sent to the barrier for the utmost test of the thoroughbred.

The most brilliant writers of the world vied with one another in describing that scene—Belmont bathed in the autumnal sunlight, half a million people gathered from the earth's four corners, the flags of six nations flung to the breeze.

Amid all that vast concourse the figure of Billy Van Buren was an object of general attention. Hundreds trailed him, eager for a word of

THOROUGHBREDS

assurance as to the chances of Viva Reina. To all inquiries he made the same reply: "The mare is ready and she'll do her best."

Sentiment rather than cold judgment made the Queen a favorite in the betting at the start. As the hour for the race approached, British sportsmen undertook a financial offensive in behalf of Brighthurst, the unbeaten black stallion; and the French and Canadian contingents unloosed a flood of coin in support of their respective entries. No one ever knew how much Van Buren actually wagered, but the rumor spread that his agents were operating under "no limit" instructions.

On his way to the paddock, Viva Reina's owner recognized Peggy Sheridan surrounded by a laughing group on the clubhouse gallery, and he bowed in acknowledgment of her greeting.

He found Viva Reina already in her stall, Sandy McKee hovering around her with all the tender solicitude of a mother applying the finishing touches to her daughter's bridal attire. Never had Viva Reina appeared more beautiful; never had the exquisite head been poised more regally, nor the luminous eyes expressed such passionate desire. Through the medium of that mysterious telepathy to which a race-horse is so sensitive, the daughter of Old Dominion and Empress Lou understood that her great hour had come, and

RIDERS UP!

with expanding nostrils she welcomed the challenge.

It was a small thing that accentuated Sandy McKee's vague uneasiness. Some one had hung a silver and purple wreath over the stall, and a moment after the saddling bell rang, the wreath, loosened by the mare's impatient stamping, fell to the tanbark floor.

The trainer had never appeared superstitious before, and Van Buren was surprised to see him pay any attention to the incident. He strove to laugh away McKee's concern, but the old Scotchman shook his head dubiously.

"It isn't altogether that, Mr. Van Buren. It's just an uncomfortable feeling I've got. Trainers get hunches, you know. I'd give anything in the world if the Queen didn't have to start."

The call to post sounded. There was a rush in the direction of the grandstand. McKee swept a final caressing hand over the smooth coat of Viva Reina—a caress that was almost like a farewell. He drew a rough hand hastily across his eyes, and handed the reins to Billy Van Buren.

"Lead her out, sir," he invited. "There's your winner, the greatest thoroughbred in the history of the world!"

Van Buren thrust out a quick hand, and McKee took it.

THOROUGHBREDS

"Sandy," declared the younger man, "I'm learning more about thoroughbreds every day." And with that enigmatic statement, Billy Van Buren took his place at the head of the procession and led the way toward the track. At the gate he surrendered the mare to the diminutive Tad Miller, her accustomed rider, and made his way hurriedly to the gallery reserved for owners opposite the judges' stand.

When they paraded past on their way to the barrier which marked the starting point of the mile-and-a-quarter struggle, every jockey was clad in the national colors of his country, and for the first time in modern turf annals, the stable colors were restricted to the plaited manes of the contenders. Viewing the mighty Brighthurst, cantering second in the line, and followed by the regal Don Pedro and the powerful Beau Monde, each carrying but five pounds more than the mare, the latter's owner appreciated keenly the heroic task that confronted the American Queen.

A moment later McKee squirmed his way up the staircase, accompanied by an expert clocker commissioned to call off the time by quarters.

It seemed that the field was at post for an hour, but in reality it was only a matter of four minutes. While thousands of glasses were leveled at the plunging, twisting barricade of color, suddenly

RIDERS UP!

it crumbled and spread, a volcanic roar ascended to the skies, and the race of the century was on.

The Argentine and Canadian colors broke first, Rio Norte and St. Egwin off flying and setting a terrific pace, Beau Monde, carrying the tricolor and lapping the leaders, and Brighthurst and Viva Reina running nose and nose at the flank of the French entry.

They made the first quarter in twenty-three seconds, and then Rio Norte faltered perceptibly. St. Egwin's head showed in front, with Beau Monde moving up.

At the second quarter, reeled off in twenty-three and one-fifth, the Canadian horse cracked under the terrific pace and fell back, the French stallion taking command, half a length in front of Viva Reina, the latter still a nose in front of Brighthurst.

At the five-eighths pole the field shifted again. This time it was the Tricolor that surrendered, and to the American mare. The great band, marshaled at the staircase, caught the signal and struck up "Dixie," but the strains were drowned in the roar of the multitude.

Billy Van Buren, watching through his glasses, estimated the positions:

"Reina a nose, Brighthurst second by a length, France third by three lengths."

THOROUGHBREDS

The two leaders, running as though they were harnessed, made the far turn and flashed past the mile post. The roaring swelled like an organ note. The race lay between England and America.

"Mile in thirty-five," called the clocker.

A smothered exclamation burst from Sandy McKee: "Pray for a slow eighth," he begged, "a slow eighth, or the Queen is gone!"

But that slow eighth never came. Lord Cumberland's jockey knew his business. He was astride a superhorse, and he acted accordingly. With horror-stricken eyes Billy Van Buren and old Sandy McKee saw the British colors dip deeper in the saddle, saw the jockey's cap go down to the powerful black neck, and realized that even with that heart-breaking mile back of them, the boy on Brighthurst was now making his move.

It was a royal challenge hurled by an equine king at a thoroughbred queen, and right royally it was met. In the deep bosom of Viva Reina was a magic quality which made surrender impossible. Into the stretch they swung, Brighthurst on the right, the American colors on the rail.

The clocker's voice cut through the maelstrom: "Eighth in eleven seconds flat!"

McKee cried out in anguish: "It's murder!"

RIDERS UP!

Pull her in, Tad—let him have it. Ease her up, boy!"

The feeble shout was lost in the storm. It would have made no difference had it been heard. With delicate ears flattened to her head and velvet eyes rolled back defiantly at her foe, Viva Reina held to the slender lead, and no mortal arms could have restrained her.

In that last staggering eighth of a mile from paddock to wire, with the multitude gone mad, Sandy McKee clutched at Billy Van Buren and screamed into the latter's ear:

"They haven't a thing left; they're finishing on class alone. Look at 'em!"

The straining eyes of the American Speed King beheld than a sight he was never to forget: Lord Cumberland's jockey plying whip and arm and heel and spur, tiny Tad Miller doubled frantically on the mare's heaving shoulders, and two gallant animals, far past the limit of their speed and endurance, rolling and bumping desperately onward after the manner of those who:

*Hold on when there is nothing in them
Except the Will which says to them:
"Hold on!"*

And in this manner, long after heart and nerve and sinew had served their turn, under the wire

THOROUGHBREDS

first, by the grace of two blood-red nostrils, flashed Viva Reina!

Up shot the blast of a half-million throats; down dropped the white figures, 1:59 3-5, spelling a new world's record; the musicians launched into the National Anthem; the joyous multitude rubbed shoulders in a common rush towards the charmed winner's circle, eager to acclaim America's matchless Queen.

It was a small thing that brought the first hush to those who were quick of eye, the sight of a hatless, gray-haired trainer running shakily up the center of the track toward the turn where the field was slowing up—then grooms and hostlers, vaulting the rail, hurried in the same direction. After them appeared the figure of Billy Van Buren, moving at top-speed away from the stands toward a blotch of color on the ground partly hidden by the curve of the fence.

The hush spread into a vast blanket of silence that descended upon beautiful Belmont like a shroud. Men turned to each other and whispered, "What's happened—what's wrong?" and they got no answer. One after another Bright-hurst, Beau Monde, Don Pedro, St. Egwin and Rio Norte came cantering back, but the flower-laden winner's circle remained without an occupant. Mercifully screened from the gaping thou-

RIDERS UP!

sands, Viva Reina had dropped with a shattered heart.

Five minutes dragged by, and an usher made his way from the judges' pagoda to the bandstand. The leader whispered his instructions; there was a hurried turning of pages, an adjustment of instruments, and then the musicians arose bare-headed. In the first strains of the death march the great crowd understood that Nature's laws had been transcended, and the Queen of the Thoroughbreds had answered with her life.

When the last note had died away, hundreds went in search of Viva Reina's owner to express to him their sympathy, but Billy Van Buren had disappeared.

At ten o'clock the next night, in the library of one of New York's most famous bankers, a pioneer business man, approaching the end of a long and arduous struggle, faced courageously a group of the city's financial wizards. In the patient silence with which they heard him he read defeat, but he talked valiantly on.

Finally a gray-haired man at the head of the table interrupted: "We had rather hoped for some more constructive suggestions," he said gently. "Have you no resources other than those mentioned?"

THOROUGHBREDS

"Only one," responded Drexel Van Buren, and he smiled a little wistfully as a man does who surrenders a treasured task to stronger hands. He laid one hand on the shoulder of a young man at his side, and again faced the gathering.

"Gentlemen," he said, "my son." And Billy Van Buren arose to his feet.

He was a trifle nervous at first, but presently he struck his stride and was smiling at them with frank boyishness.

"Why, it's like this, you see," he explained. "Life is a good deal like a race-course, full of sprints, and handicaps and stake events, and it takes us some little time to get our bearings, learn our lessons, and discover in what event we are best fitted to start. Right now, Father is entered in a race under rather trying conditions. He's been campaigning a long time—a little too long, perhaps, to carry successfully all the weight that's assigned to him; so I'm going to start too; it will be a sort of stable entry, you know."

"You?" questioned the man at the head of the table.

"Yes," said Billy Van Buren. "Last night and to-day I arranged to dispose of my stables, my 'planes, my cars, my cruisers, my farm, everything by which the public identifies me. I'll sell these clothes if anybody wants them. The only thing

RIDERS UP!

I won't sell is this": he threw aside his coat and revealed a small bow fashioned of silver and purple ribbon.

"I took that from the mane of Viva Reina," he said with assumed lightness, "and I rather expect to wear it—henceforth."

The president of the banking house of Dwight Robinson and Company stirred in his seat. "May I ask," he said, "just how much money you expect to realize from your personal holdings, and are we to understand that you contemplate putting it all into the business?"

"Certainly," said Billy Van Buren. "The firm needs about seven million in cash. Father has three million in Liberties which can be disposed of at ninety-three, and there is another half million in easily convertible assets. I won a half million yesterday and expect to realize close to a million from my personal belongings. I ask an extension on the balance due and for security offer the reputation and tangible assets of an old-established firm, together with my personal services."

"Ah!" said the man at the head of the table with a smile, "you are entering the firm yourself?"

"Of course," assured Van Buren, "I shall probably be bumped around a bit at first, but I've got

THOROUGHBREDS

my father's blood in me, and his knowledge of the track. This much I know already: if you let us go to the wall, the South American trade falls into British hands, and you, as bankers, can't afford to let that happen. Dalrymple left us as part of a conspiracy; well, I'm here to take his place. Load all the weight on me you want; name an advisory committee to guard against mistakes and to tell me what to do, and I'll give you everything that's in me, and maybe a little bit more."

The chairman directed a questioning glance around the table. He counted the nods of approval and found them in the majority. His tired eyes lighted.

"H'm," he commented, "the situation seems to be clearing up."

A young man entered the room and laid a card in front of the chairman, but before the latter had time to read the name, the door was opened by Peggy Sheridan herself.

The daughter of Senator Sheridan, attired in a motor costume that bore fresh streaks of mud and oil, strode straight up to the man who was on his feet.

"I'd have got here sooner," she said hurriedly, "only I blew a tire and the darned car turned over. Father told me where to find you. He says you've sold everything. Billy—you're in trouble!"

RIDERS UP!

"Not exactly that," demurred Van Buren. "I'm merely an overnight entry in a new race. These gentlemen are going to back me, I think, as the new general manager of Van Buren and Company, and I'm surrendering speed in favor of class."

Miss Sheridan's eyes sparkled. "Can I help?" she asked. "Give me fifteen days and I can throw two millions into the pot—thirty days, and I'll bet I can do shorthand and typewriting. Now don't reject me, Billy, in the presence of everybody!"

"Lord God!" exclaimed Billy Van Buren. "Peggy!"

The president of the Columbia Trust Company leaned over and addressed the senior member of the firm of Dwight Robinson. "No wonder we won the war," he whispered, "when we have children like that, eh?"

IX. THE KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

*The field is large and the start is bad,
And the green colt runs as he can;
But see the weight that he packs, my lad,
Ere you brand him an "also-ran"!*

"**T**HAT'S the three-eighths pole, and you mustn't touch it!"

Mrs. Tupman contemplated the broom in dismay.

"But, Tommy, the room must be swept, dear."

"Not now, Mamma; it's nice and cool, and I want General Jack to work three-quarters this morning, 'cause he starts to-morrow. And the paddock is all out of place. It belongs over here alongside the grandstand like it is in the picture. And the judges' stand is *crooked!*"

"Which is the paddock, dear?"

"*That* chair with the string around it, and the other is the stables, and I would like them to face the track, so the horses can come right out through the gate."

"Like that?"

"Yes, and now I am going to bring out General Jack."

RIDERS UP!

Presently a framework of twine, spread over cross sticks and suspended from the ceiling, yielded to a pull on one end, and from the opposite side an empty catsup bottle, with a purple ribbon tied around its throat, began a spasmodic progress by means of a wheel and a small pulley. Along a second strand of twine a smaller bottle decorated with a yellow label trailed the first starter.

"That's Yellow-hammer," explained the owner. "General Jack doesn't like to work alone, but you watch him extend himself as soon as he hears his stable-mate coming up."

Mrs. Tupman watched the two bottles as they were maneuvered into position opposite the three-quarters pole, which was the washstand. Suddenly the miniature track tilted, and General Jack lurched forward, Yellow-hammer at his side.

"Sure you got him, Mamma?"

Mrs. Tupman nodded and glanced down at the stop-watch in her hand. The make-believe thoroughbreds rolled past the half-mile post, careened around the far turn and straightened out for the run home. Gradually, General Jack assumed a commanding lead which increased at the paddock, still more as he approached the judges' pagoda, otherwise the bed.

"Now!"

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

Mrs. Tupman pressed her thumb sharply, and then came forward with the watch.

"Why, he made it in one-eleven and four-fifths!" reported the owner of the Tupman stables. "And the Tijuana track is over two seconds slower than Belmont. He's a stake-horse, Mamma. You better let me have them now, 'cause I got to rub 'em down."

Mrs. Tupman unriggered the bottles and put them by the pillow.

"Please, Tommy, don't exert——"

"I won't," he promised. "Only I got to give Yellow-hammer special attention; he's the best horse I got."

"Poor Yellow-hammer—you never let him win!"

"That's 'cause he's an also-ran, Mamma. I like also-rans the best, because there's always something the matter with them, and I pretend that one day I am going to fix it."

Mrs. Tupman turned her back quickly, and a moment later found it necessary to leave the room. Mothers sometimes find the road to Calvary a little beyond their strength.

At an imaginary feed-trough General Jack and Yellow-hammer reposed contentedly. Their owner fumbled at the stop-watch and looked out the window. A street-car passed, and he timed

RIDERS UP!

it between telegraph poles; a dog snooped around the corner, and he measured its progress; machines whizzed past, and he caught them accurately—likewise hurrying business men, and women strolling along behind baby-buggies.

Tommy like everything that moved. That was because he himself could not move at all.

Perhaps it would be just as well if you didn't visualize Tommy *too distinctly*. He had very large blue eyes set in a very pale small face, and according to his mother's Bible he was twelve, or should have been. But Biblical references to time are susceptible to various interpretations. Tommy was ages old in some respects; in others he had not lived at all. He had been in bed for a long time because of something with a big name—it doesn't matter what, but it had no business picking on a little fellow whose father was a trainer of fast horses and had always measured life with a stop-watch. That should have been obvious enough even to the Great Handicapper, who must surely have been looking out the window when little Tommy Tupman was sent to the post carrying all that weight.

But, again, handicappers are shrewd judges of quality, and when they assign top weight to a thoroughbred, even a small one like Tommy Tup-

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

man, the reason is sometimes apparent after the race is run.

Tommy inherited his father's estate, which was exempt from taxation because it consisted principally of the watch and a motley collection of photographs, notebooks and form-charts.

Mrs. Tupman wept a great deal at first, but of course that did not help; so she moved into a rear upstairs flat in the Fourth Ward and bought a sewing machine on the instalment plan, and made children's clothes for neighbors.

Tommy himself did very well. He capitalized his inheritance, and fashioned therefrom a world of his own in which he was the king. It was a rather strange world, for it existed for the benefit of also-rans. Tommy was not clear in his own mind about some of the rules, but the winners only won because he *let* them win, while the also-rans—the horses that finished out of the money—were always the real winners because he knew that if he hadn't asked them to go outside their distance, or had given them less weight, or a better rider, or had let them set the pace as they wanted to—why, they could have won, *easily*!

You see, Tommy was a student of the speed-sheet, which is only made for very wise men, or for little Tommy Tupmans, because to apply it, you must first reduce the time made by various

RIDERS UP!

horses on different days and over different sorts of footing to the common basis of a standard fast track. Then you must establish a track-variant for the day, converting time into speed, and translating poundage into points, bearing in mind that a horse runs his length in a fifth of a second, that the weight-bearing capacity of horses varies, and that sometimes in a long race the whole field is pumped out at the head of the stretch, so that the final time must be discarded in favor of the early pace if the speed-deductions are to hold.

If you know all these things, and fifty others, it is theoretically possible by means of the speed-sheet to forecast the actual performance of race-horses, always providing, of course, that the owner is trying and no accident occurs to upset the calculations.

The Tupman stable was always *trying*, but neither General Jack nor Yellow-hammer ever won. They were likely always to remain maid-ens, unadorned with winning brackets, because their owner persisted in sending them outside their distance, or giving them too much weight, or intrusting them to stable-boys who rushed them off their feet so that they had nothing left at the finish. He entered them both in the Kentucky Derby once, and let a rank outsider—a pepper-

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

can from the Cupboard Stable—romp home all by himself.

That was the day Tommy got Kressy to write the also-ran letters which were responsible for so many things.

Kressy was tall and dark and young, and on Monday afternoons he acted as starter, timer and assistant judge at the private race track of His Majesty. His name was Dr. Ward Kressinger, and he had progressed so far in his studies as to conclude that there was no God, and that what mankind needed most was not *materia medica*, but sociological surgery. When he first met Tommy Tupman, Kressy was more than ever convinced that the only cure for society lay in a capital operation—wherefore he made of his profession a cloak, and of his black bag a receptacle for certain literature which he distributed among comrades.

His convictions were expressed so forcibly to the little group that gathered occasionally to discuss their plans, that Comrade Max Wolfram, who ran a cigar-factory on Ninth Street, appointed Kressy on a committee where he could have more power and be better watched. For Max was really an agent for the Department of Justice and very much interested in young Dr. Kressinger's views.

"The real Derby was yesterday," said Tommy, "and Mamma has read me the form-chart out of the paper. Now, I should like you to write the letters for me. I shall write to the owner of Empress of India first, because that one propped at the start, and finished last. Do you think if we addressed Mr. Van Lessing at Churchill Downs, it would reach him, Kressy?"

"If we can't reach him one way, we may another," said Kressinger grimly, and unscrewed his fountain pen. "What shall I write?"

"You should say," dictated His Majesty, "that we are very sorry about what happened to the Empress of India, because the times of the day before showed that the track variant was almost 80, which meant that with only 121 pounds, she should have gone the mile and a quarter in 2:02 2-5. That would have made the Empress win by two lengths, Kressy."

"Two lengths?"

"Almost three—you should say *three*, Kressy, 'cause with that early pace she would have been rated with the leaders instead of back where she usually is; so—we are very sorry that she did not win."

Kressinger's lips tightened. "How much money would Lessing have won if the Empress of India

had not propped? I suppose you don't know that, Tommy?"

"Oh, yes, I do, Kressy—it is in the form-chart. There was fifty thousand added——"

"Think of it!" said the amanuensis. "Fifty thousand dollars because an animal—what did you say the Empress of India did?"

"Propped—it is in the footnote. The Empress reared up when the barrier sprang, Kressy—that is very bad, because sometimes they come down sideways or turn around, and then of course the field is ever so much in the lead."

"How in the devil—where do you learn such things, Tommy?"

His Majesty considered this question. "I don't know, Kressy; I guess it's from the pictures and the books, my daddy's books—and from just thinking. I think an awful lot. We will write some more letters now—or are you tired, Kressy?"

"Tired?"

"Don't you get tired, Kressy?"

"H'm! Well, not of writing letters," said Kressinger, and added something under his breath.

"I get tired sometimes," Tommy confessed, "and it hurts, don't it, Kressy?"

"H'm!"

RIDERS UP!

"That's what makes some horses also-rans. I always pretend that Yellow-hammer is *especially* tired. I think I will write to Mr. Jake Sterling now, and then to Colonel Rawlings, and then to Mr. Herbert."

Kressinger looked up quickly. "Mortimer Herbert?"

"Yes," said Tommy. "He owns Star o' Dawn, which finished fourth——"

"Must you write to him?"

"It is very important," declared His Majesty, "'cause Star o' Dawn carried my favorite colors—light blue on silver. What color do you like best, Kressy?"

Kressinger mused a moment, thinking of a military decoration that reposed at the bottom of his trunk. Those days seemed far away. His lips twisted ironically.

"There is only one color for also-rans, Tommy, only one great color—the red of purification, the flame that reflects the heart of universal brotherhood, the blood of Adam, the clean red blood that must save the race. Yes, I think red is my favorite."

"It is a nice color," said His Majesty, politely, "but I like light blue and silver because they are the colors of the sky and the stars, and those

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

things do not move; they are like me, and sometimes I talk to them."

Kressinger's pen traced idle circles and crosses on the note-pad. He rose abruptly and crossed over to the window, staring unseeingly across back-yard treetops to the span of street beyond. Once he used to dream of taking Tommy Tupman in his arms when the great day came, and making a speech from the courthouse steps that should live in history; but that was before he knew Tommy very well. Now, it appeared that His Majesty's soul, or whatever one called it, contradicted the twisted body, and the example was not as clear as it might otherwise have been.

"If you are tired," suggested the voice from the bed, "we will only write to Mr. Herbert to-day, and Mamma can send the other letters to-morrow."

Kressinger wheeled back to the chair, reached for the notebook, and considered. There was a very good reason why he should not write to the Herberts, of all people—but the letter would certainly never reach the mining magnate, and anyway it was Tommy Tupman who was doing it.

"I'm not at all tired, Tommy," he assured him; "what shall I say?"

"You should say, Kressy, that they are not to

RIDERS UP!

feel badly because Star o' Dawn was an also-ran, because he comes from the Glorioso line, and they are strongest in the fourth year. You see, he really carried very much more than one hundred and twenty-one pounds because his jockey only weighed ninety-two, and that means twenty-nine pounds of lead, which is one and a half times as heavy as live weight. I think, Kressy, that Star o' Dawn really won, because he did one-half point better than his figure. Do you think he would send me a picture of Star o' Dawn, Kressy?"

"We will ask him. Shall I sign it "Tommy Tupman?"

"Yes."

Kressinger penned the name thoughtfully and then wrote underneath—"The little king of the also-rans."

There were other letters, all devoted to horses who had lost, and His Highness explained very clearly how each animal had really run his race, all difficulties considered, and therefore was to be considered a winner. For instance, there was Gray Daughter, who had the misfortune to draw the outside position, whereas she was at her best when running on the rail; and there was Knight Norfolk, whom the footnote said was

pinched off three times, and coming like a whirlwind at the end.

"Don't you see, Kressy, the also-rans really did ever so much better than those that finished in the money? I think it is lots more fun to be an also-ran."

"You do, eh?"

"'Cause they have to keep on wishing and trying, and I like that best. If I let Yellowhammer or General Jack win, I don't think they would do as well any more, 'cause now they know they must *improve*."

It was a strange viewpoint. Dr. Kressinger's finely chiseled features were softened in revery.

"Is there anything you'd like especially, Tommy?" the Doctor asked presently.

His Majesty was silent a moment. He was always thoughtful when any one offered him anything. "I like lots of things, Kressy," he confessed, "but I get to thinking about it, and then it seems that I don't really need them, after all. There is no use my wanting what I can't use, is there, Kressy?"

"No," said Kressinger, "probably not—probably not!"

He gathered up the letters and went out, promising to return again the following Monday; and this was the night that down at Max Wolfram's

cigar-store, the executive committee issued the "Great Call." There were many letters, all of them in code, and they summoned to a conference such men as Iram Bonfield, of Seattle; Olof Krunsen, of San Francisco; Ryan, of Brooklyn, and Wyckoffsky, of Philadelphia, who were dark horses in the Great Handicap of the Also-Rans.

Dr. Ward Kressinger did not write any of the letters. He was not even present when they were written. That was because he was detained at the corner of Ninth and Elm streets by Mrs. Luiza Vezina, who ran shrieking from her tenement into the darkness, crying: "*Santa Maria—un dottore! Un dottore per bambina mia!*"

She recognized Kressinger's black bag, and made for him. In her arms she clutched something in a smoking blanket. Kressinger took it from her grasp, and the heat seared his hands. The bundle writhed. He jumped in the path of an automobile, and brakes ground while the driver swore.

"Emergency hospital," said Kressinger, "two blocks up and then to the left. Quick, man—or I'll be cooked too!"

So, while Max Wolfram was supervising the council of comrades five blocks distant, Dr. Ward Kressinger, his hands very shockingly burned, stood over the blackened form of little Elsie

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

Vezina, who clung to life so very hard that it was necessary to coat her blackened body with air-excluding salve as a man might plaster the wall of a house, and also use very much morphine, until mercy was granted in the early morning.

In due time the also-ran letters reached their various destinations—all except one. Mortimer Herbert had the misfortune to be killed in an automobile accident, and so he never knew that Star o' Dawn figured to carry weight much better in his fourth year. Tommy Tupman's letter, with others that seemed to be of a personal nature, were turned over by a lawyer to Miss Dorothy Herbert, along with a million dollars or so, and the beautiful Miss Herbert became more than ever a favorite in the Social Sweepstakes.

It was weeks after her father's funeral before Dorothy Herbert got around to Tommy Tupman's letter. She read the missive one morning, in the library of the stone mansion on Cypress Drive. It was tucked between an invitation from the Carroll Browns to visit them in Honolulu, and a note from Whit Spence, saying he was getting up a party for the Winter Horse Show, and could he have the honor?

She might have dismissed His Majesty's letter

as beyond her comprehension, had it not been for the handwriting, particularly that curious upward twist of the k in *king*. Miss Herbert read the letter three times, and then went upstairs to the escritoire in her bedroom, and resurrected a bundle of letters from a drawer that was always locked. These letters had the mark of the military censor, and in the upper left-hand corner of the envelopes was an address culminating in the mystic "A.E.F." She spread several letters out before her and compared them with Tommy Tupman's missive. Her white teeth bit meditatively at the tip of a penholder.

In her own way Dorothy Herbert was a direct-actionist. Two hours later a limousine was threading its way across town, toward the North Bridge and the unfamiliar neighborhood that spread beyond. Among the rear cushions sat the daughter of the late Mortimer Herbert looking dreamily out the window, and by her side, wrapped carefully in tissue paper, was the best portrait of Star o' Dawn she could find.

It was Mrs. Tupman who came to the door, drying her hands on an apron.

"Good morning," smiled Miss Herbert. "Is this where the little king of the also-rans lives? I have brought the picture of Star o' Dawn."

Mrs. Tupman looked bewildered.

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

"Little king——"

"Master Tommy Tupman, I mean. I am Miss Herbert, you see." Her hands fumbled in a velvet purse and produced the letter. "The request interested me greatly. May I see Tommy?"

Mrs. Tupman read the letter, and her face cleared. "Oh, Tommy must have got Dr. Kressinger to write the letter. It was very kind of you to answer it like this—but he is rather shy of strangers. You see, he has been in bed for such a long time——"

"In bed?"

"Yes, he cannot move at all, you know—except one hand. It is his spine. But he loves race-horses——"

"Oh," said Miss Herbert. "Oh! How old is he?"

"Just twelve."

"Of all things!" exclaimed the beautiful Miss Herbert. "Where is he? No, no, no—Mrs. Tupman—I am going *in*! You must not try to stop me."

So that was the way the little king of the also-rans came to receive in audience the owner of Star o' Dawn. First it was with the bed shielded by a Japanese screen, with a long-legged white stork looming against a blue sky. His Majesty usually protected himself from strangers that

way, because they stood by his bed and looked at him, making funny little noises with their tongues that he did not like.

But soon the screen was down, Miss Herbert had been admitted to royal favor, and His Majesty's eyes were feasting on the picture of Star o' Dawn, while his ears drank in the wonderful story of the great mare, Dawn o' Virginia, with certain embellishments which the daughter of Mortimer Herbert invented on the spot.

Later, Tommy Tupman brought out General Jack and Yellow-hammer for an exercise gallop, and let his visitor hold the watch, while the stable companions breezed a half-mile between the washstand and the bookcase. He explained his theories about also-rans so very clearly that Miss Herbert understood, and remained very still, sitting there with her eyes on the small pale face turned sidewise on the pillow.

"Everything about you is very pretty, isn't it?" he said wistfully. "Mamma hasn't got as nice clothes, or as pretty rings, and her cheeks aren't the color of yours. I guess she's older. I guess you're not an also-ran, are you? Kressy's an also-ran, he says."

"Kressy?"

"Dr. Kressinger, you know. He comes on Mondays to see me—only he didn't come last

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

Monday. I wish you were an also-ran, 'cause I like them."

Miss Herbert bit her lip and came forward to sit on the bed and run a light hand over the King's high forehead.

"Dear child," she whispered, "what ever made you think I wasn't an also-ran? The only thing I ever tried to win, I lost. And I'm not really pretty—I'm just fixed up."

His Highness betrayed quick concern.

"Why didn't you win?" he demanded.

Miss Herbert pursed her lips thoughtfully. "I don't know, Tommy. I guess I didn't just measure up. Maybe a little too much weight," she added whimsically. "Some day I'll tell you about it. I'm going to call regularly, you know—and we are going to be good friends. I want you to give me a special name, too—the way you do for Dr. Kressinger."

"I think I will call you 'Lady,' " said His Highness, "—just Lady—'cause there was a Lady Courageous once—it is in my daddy's book with a picture; and she was an also-ran until Sandy McKee trained her for almost a year, and then she came out in bandages and beat Lord Ivan at Latonia a neck on the post and going away. My daddy has it down in the book that it was a very wonderful race, 'cause Lady Courageous ran

twelve points above her mark, and that was 'cause she loved Mr. McKee, and they both had waited such a long time."

"I see," nodded Miss Herbert. "I shall be Lady, then—lady in waiting." She rose abruptly.

"Tommy, I don't think I should say anything to any one, if I were you, about our little visits——"

"Not even to Kressy?"

"Not even to Kressy, dear. It will just be a jolly little secret between ourselves, and I will come on Wednesdays so that you can show me all about the speed-sheet. Is there something you would like me to bring you, Tommy?"

"Yes, I would like some new string for the track over at the far turn where it is knotted. Yellow-hammer most always stumbles when he strikes that place—it is like the Pemberton track, which my book says is most always cuppy. I would like it to be the Belmont track, which is very fast. I would also like you to put Star o' Dawn on top of the paddock. I will pretend that is a very special stall."

Miss Herbert complied, and then leaning over the bed put her lips to Tommy Tupman's forehead. He flushed and looked up shyly.

"Why did you do that?"

"Just because," explained the lady in waiting,

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

"I couldn't help it! Good-by, Tommy, and I shall bring some brand-new twine on Wednesday."

"Good-by, Lady!" said His Majesty.

Before reëntering her limousine, Miss Herbert interviewed Mrs. Tupman and learned exactly what sort of weight it was that had been assigned to the small monarch of the also-rans. Then she drove straight to her family physician, who referred her to a distinguished surgeon, and the latter took a long time to explain a simple thing, which was that the one man who might have done something for little Tommy Tupman was dead, and the medical world was helpless.

Next, Miss Herbert visited the toy-department of a great store, and for an hour clerks and even the department manager himself waited on her—until out of a wealth of imported novelties, a miniature racing-establishment materialized. But on her way down the elevator, the tactful Miss Herbert remembered poor Yellow-hammer and the faithful General Jack, and she realized that she had been on the verge of a diplomatic blunder. The elated salesman saw her returning, and anticipated an additional investment.

"I wish to cancel the order," she told him. "You may give me, instead, a ball of twine—yes, just a ball of twine."

RIDERS UP!

In the evening Miss Herbert wrote a polite note of regret to Whittington Spence, and an equally polite note to the Carroll Browns, and a great many other courteous missives—all extremely regretful. It was really quite a negative day for the usually positive Miss Herbert, and it ended much as it had begun—at the little writing-desk in her bedroom, with a half-dozen letters spread before her, all of them in the handwriting of Tommy Tupman's amanuensis.

It is one of the most pronounced characteristics of also-rans that on certain days and on certain kinds of track they behave in a very peculiar manner. The same, for that matter, may be said about certain kinds of favorites. Even her most ardent admirers might have experienced some difficulty in recognizing the daughter of Mortimer Herbert the following Wednesday afternoon when she visited the court of His Majesty. She had her back turned to the door, and was standing on a stool endeavoring to rebuild the turn at the five-eighths pole, when Dr. Ward Kressinger, his hands still bandaged, entered unannounced.

"Why, hello, Kressy!" cried His Majesty. "I have some more string, and this is Lady—my new friend. She is trying to fix the track so it won't be cuppy."

"So I see," acknowledged the physician politely. "My hands are rather out of condition, but perhaps I can——"

And then he recognized Lady.

Miss Herbert looked down and smiled. Her quick laugh bridged the situation.

"Dr. Kressinger and I are old friends, Tommy. —Ward, do you think you could manage this pulley? . . . Why, what happened to your hands?"

Kressinger had to fight for his composure, but finally he managed it. "I burned them a little bit—nothing serious. I think if you pass the string *under* the top wheel, and then over——"

"Like that?"

"That's it, and then down the home stretch, so. —How's that, Tommy? Pretty good track superintendent, isn't she?"

"Yes," said His Majesty. "And I am glad you know her already. She is lots prettier when she is fixed up."

"Why, *Tommy!*"

"Well," argued His Majesty, "you had a lot of pretty rings the last time, and your clothes were a lot nicer, and your hair——"

"I think," suggested Kressy, "that we had better try General Jack and Yellow-hammer on

the new track to make sure that it works properly."

That was really a very important little speech, because had Kressy laughed, or even smiled, Miss Herbert would never have forgiven him, and His Majesty's court would have been disrupted on the spot. Instead of that there was an excellent work-out between the stable companions, and General Jack breezed a half-mile over the new track in .48 with his mouth open, Kressy holding the watch.

That was, of course, a smart performance, and it should have elicited great enthusiasm from the owner of the Tupman string. Kressinger knew from experience that such should be the case. He was strangely perturbed by the King's apathy.

"What's the matter?" he asked quickly. "Doesn't it work all right?"

His Majesty inclined his head against the pillow. "Yes," he acknowledged, "that is winning time. I did not think it would be quite—so *fast*."

Perhaps it was that the sky was cloudy, or His Highness was not used to more than one visitor at a time. He looked suddenly frailer than usual. Kressinger's dark eyes expanded, for there is a mystic kinship between also-rans.

"Tired?" he asked, and strove to put the ques-

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

tion lightly, but the lady in waiting recognized the tremor in his voice, and shot him a quick glance.

"Not very," whispered His Majesty, "just a little. What is back of the sky, Kressy?"

Kressinger hesitated and looked at Miss Herbert, who came forward quickly.

"Why there is Some One who looks after little boys, and makes everything come out all right, dear," she explained. "Now, you must try to go to sleep, and Kressy and I will come back some afternoon when you are feeling stronger."

His eyes assented. "If you will put the watch here where I can see it," he whispered, "I can time the clouds. Is it the Some One that makes the clouds move?"

"Yes," she answered, "but don't think about it too much. Good-by, Tommy."

"Good-by, Lady—good-by, Kressy."

"Good-by," said Kressinger.

Out in the hallway the lady in waiting turned upon the official timer.

"Ward, he's not *going*? Not without ever having lived? You're a doctor—isn't there *anything* that can be done?"

Head down, Kressinger studied his bandaged hands. "Perhaps now, you will understand the wall that arose between us. There are so very

many Tommy Tupmans—so many also-rans—and they have no chance under the present system. It is far worse in Europe. I went there to study one thing, as you know; and I learned many others. When I came back, such things as your family stood for seemed—forgive me—a little criminal. There were only two paths open to me: you—and what I considered my duty.”

“I begin to understand,” said Miss Herbert. “You had to choose duty because you were a born physician, isn’t that it?”

Kressinger looked up suddenly, and she saw that his eyes were flooded.

“It is kind of you to put it that way,” he said brokenly. “But I was never anything but an also-ran. I have tried to do what seemed right at the time, but the path always grows harder. I gave up you; I surrendered my profession; now it seems that I must give up Tommy—and God help me, I love you both so very much!”

They were silent a moment.

“I went to see Marshfield at the Children’s Hospital yesterday,” said the lady in waiting.

Kressinger nodded. “He knows the case. I brought him here once, and we made a lumbar puncture for a test of the spinal fluid——”

“He said,” continued Miss Herbert, “that if Tommy continued to like things that moved, he

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

would live, but that he would never be able himself to move, unless some one took up the research work where Heifetz of Vienna left off, and found the serum for which the world is waiting."

There was another moment of silence. Kressinger broke it.

"You know, then, that I was Heifetz's pupil when the war broke out?"

"Yes," she answered. "Marshfield said he understood you were with him when he died. He said that no young doctor could afford to devote his life to such experiments, for it meant sacrificing everything, and then probably failure in the end."

The lady in waiting laid her hand on Kressy's coat-sleeve.

"Ward," she pleaded, "it may seem a million-to-one shot, but surely if you help little Tommy Tupmans, you are helping the world."

Kressinger eyed her wistfully. "And so I give up still another dream," he mused. "Yesterday I was to operate on society; to-day I am committed permanently to the company of rabbits and guinea pigs and white mice—all because the little king of the also-rans admits to being tired."

He drew a deep breath. The flame of the visionary was already illuminating his finely cut

RIDERS UP!

features. The lady in waiting held out her hand impulsively, and he grasped it.

"Good luck!" she said.

"Wait," he reminded her. "You forget that the little fellow must *want* to go on living."

Miss Herbert smiled mistily. "Suppose, Ward, that you leave that part of it to me?"

So Dr. Ward Kressinger went no more to Max Wolfram's cigar-store, which was just as well, since Max took the trouble himself to find out why, and, being a man of considerable parts, kept his conclusions to himself, but at the proper time, saw to it that the balance of the Council of Comrades was quietly seized for deportation.

Dorothy Herbert made two important investments, and gave them both away. One represented an even million dollars and was for the construction of the Tommy Tupman Children's Hospital, permanently endowed. The other was a more modest affair—only sixteen hundred dollars—but it was the highest price ever paid for a month-old puppy. Of course, this was an exceptional sort of puppy, sired by the imported greyhound Wellington out of Lady Lightning, the pick of the litter.

"Yes, ma'am," assured old man McTigue, "there's a dog that will one day, with the right kind of handling, run the five-sixteenths in close

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

to thirty seconds; mark my words, ma'am, that pup will outrun his own shadow!"

All of this information Miss Herbert treasured up for transmittal to the King when she brought the absurd little long-legged creature into the royal presence in order that His Highness should desire to live.

We will have to pretend that the blue screen with the white stork was in the way, for it would be *lèse-majesté* to intrude upon that presentation ceremony. Even Kressy and the lady in waiting deemed it necessary to withdraw for a little while.

Later they went back, and discovered that the royal pet had made the acquaintance of all the furniture, and been christened Lord Bumps, and was now asleep under the judges' pagoda.

Miss Herbert was inclined to be disappointed until Kressy explained that lots of good horses are called sleepers, and they always come to life at the most unexpected times, and especially when the price is right. Nevertheless they stirred up Lord Bumps, and shooed him around the room, while His Highness timed him between every post.

"I love Lord Bumps," he told them, "'cause I own him, and I don't have to pretend that he is alive. You don't suppose he will mind if I don't let him run so very fast, do you?"

"No," Kressy assured him, "it will be all right for him to be an also-ran; but some day we will tell you of an idea that none but the Lady could have thought of, and maybe you will like him to go fast. She is a very wonderful lady, Tommy."

"I love her," stoutly proclaimed His Highness. "Don't you, Kressy?"

"Always have," he answered.

Tommy looked at the beautiful Miss Herbert. "I love Kressy," he challenged.

"Do you?" smiled the lady in waiting. "Why, I do too!"

The new Tommy Tupman Children's Hospital overlooks the upper end of the lake. Sight-seeing busses operate along the boulevard below, and leather-lunged pilots announce through megaphones to tourists that the stone bungalow on the eminence to the left is the home of Mrs. Kressinger, daughter of the late Mortimer Herbert. Her husband is the distinguished scientist whose experiments in the cure of spinal meningitis have attracted the attention of the medical world.

But not even the chariot orators know that behind the high elm trees which flank the bungalow there is a sixteenth-of-a-mile replica of the Belmont course, with a paddock and stables and judges' pagoda; and the track is always fast, because it is macadamized. Further, the inside

KING OF THE ALSO-RANS

rail is padded all the way round, so that there can be no accident at the turns.

On warm mornings Lord Bumps—fat and disgracefully out of condition—is brought from the stables by a groom. Then His Majesty appears, lying prone on a little coaster, equipped with four rubber-tired wheels. He wears a jockey's cap of pale blue and silver. The vehicle is piloted into place at the barrier, and Tommy Tupman rests one hand on a strap which girths Lord Bumps.

A glance at the stop-watch on the dashboard, a look at the groom, and the barrier goes up. They are off! Lord Bumps has never worked five-sixteenths better than 3:49 2-5, but His Majesty has it figured out according to the speed-sheet that such a mark is twenty points above the handicap figure, and therefore the son of Wellington is really entitled to the Winner's circle.

Sometimes a man in a white apron emerges from his laboratory long enough to watch these work-outs and compliment His Highness. Then he goes thoughtfully into his hermitage again, and if you would accept Tommy Tupman's word for it, plays all day long with guinea pigs and rabbits.

Of course, no one can really tell yet; but Kressinger is quite a wonderful man, and what is more important, his soul is in his work.

X. THE EMPTY STALL

*A lion and a horse one day debated which
Of them possessed the most discriminating sight;
A hair all white in milk the lion saw at night;
The horse by night perceived a sable hair in pitch.*

“**I** DIDN'T get that last one,” said Henry the Rat, “you're on my cronk ear; just a minute 'til I turn over.”

The Information Kid elevated the wick of the stable lamp, and waited until his colleague had readjusted a pudgy frame on a straw pallet. Then he re-read aloud the Arabian legend. Henry blinked thoughtfully.

“I'd hang up both numbers if I was judging it. Looks like fifty-fifty to me.”

The Information Kid demurred scornfully. “I say the horse has the edge. Milk is easier to see at night time than pitch, ain't it? Here's another one:

*Haymour, the peerless chestnut steed
Of Hussein, sheik of El Medæen,
Was said to be so light of foot
That on a woman's bosom he
Could dance, nor leave the slightest bruise.*

THE EMPTY STALL

"That'll be about all of that stuff," protested the Rat. "The guy who wrote that was dizzy. Any time I'd let a goat dance on my chest——"

"You don't get the idea at all," said the Kid, "this stuff is poetry, and poetry is supposed to be mysterious. You get a kick from doping it out. You ain't going to know nothing about horses, Henry, until you go back into history and read the yarn about Kaureen, the mare of Solomon, and the story of Lahla and Abou el Mahr."

"Who did they ever beat?"

"They beat hell; that's what they did! Ain't I been trying to tell you all night that if a guy has a good horse, he's jake for life? You want to read up about Alexander the Great, the Duke of Wellington, Napoleon, and Grant and Lee. You don't see no statues of those guys without their horses. King Richard lost out because he couldn't get a horse. And there was Paul Revere, and General Sheridan—he booted a horse for twenty miles and come under the wire just in time to save the day——"

"*Twenty miles!*"—echoed Henry—"now I know you're lying. There ain't no dog in the country that can run half that distance unless he's tied to a train."

"I'll massage you with a pair of fives if you

tells me I'm lying. Go look it up in the public library to-morrow night."

Henry demurred sleepily. "I got passes for that racing picture up at the Empress."

"What racing picture?"

"Them Four Horsemen."

The Information Kid stared. "You wouldn't understand that picture, Henry. You don't know nothing about the Scriptures."

"Maybe not," Henry acknowledged, "but I passed right by where they come from. You was with me, wasn't you?"

"What you talking about?"

"Po-kyp-sie—that's where them horsemen come from. Ain't you seen it on the billboards?"

"Apocalypse," corrected the Information Kid wearily. "Henry, you're awful dumb——"

"Well, where is Apocalypse if you're such a wise guy?"

"It's in the Bible somewhere, and it hasn't got nothing to do with racing."

The Rat squeaked his disgust. "I thought there was something phoney about it, or Father Fred wouldn't have been so free with those passes. Let's go to sleep."

The student of Arabian poetry extinguished the light, and laid himself down on a stable cot. Presently, the darkness of the tackle room held

THE EMPTY STALL

no sound save the gentle breathing of Henry the Rat and the Information Kid. Outside, the velvet mantle of night draped a border race track and long rows of stalls that stretched away like the fingers of a giant hand. Overhead, twinkled the stars of Mexico, looking down upon a new camp of the thoroughbred.

Earth's silver satellite rose languidly from a bed of cotton clouds. It was the same moon that smiled upon the first primitive love, and that saw earth's children playing odd and even with pebbles at the closed gates of Eden. It was the same pale Mistress of the Heavens that lighted the way for that lovely Arabian who bore in her teeth across the desert to safety and home the trussed form of her helpless master.

Now the Queen of Night looked down upon 800 thoroughbreds resting in their stalls, and upon the army of slumbering attendants, old and young, conglomerate of blood and color, drawn from the earth's corners by the lure of Fortuna.

Henry the Rat moved uneasily, dreaming that he was at Johnny Powell's crap layout, and that a cross-eyed man was threatening his run of luck. The Information Kid burrowed more deeply into the blankets, revolving in his mind the opening lines of the book he had discovered only that night:

RIDERS UP!

*"Mahlek Ben Essedin sings:
'Horses are birds without wings.'"*

The twang of a banjo came from across the tanbark path, accompanied by the voice of Tredwell's dusky trainer:

*"Mah old horse am dead and gone
But he left his jawbone ploughin' de corn."*

Off in the darkness a horse stamped restlessly, then another, and a third. A shrill equine scream of terror rang out like a bugle. Bang! Bang!—two pistol shots.

The Information Kid and Henry the Rat propped themselves on their elbows. A dull red glare was eating its way into the darkness that lay beyond the open half-door of the stall. Even as they watched this phenomenon stupidly, electric gongs sounded in paddock, grandstand, and a score of stables. The light grew brighter, and a watchman flashed past, shouting as he ran:

"Get 'em out, boys! Get 'em out! The whole damn' thing's going!"

The two hustlers scrambled from their blankets, and bolted from the tackle room. A pillar of flame burst through the roof of the Waterford stables, and bent under the wind toward the Sterling barns. Trainers, swipes, and jockeys tumbled

THE EMPTY STALL

over one another in a desperate rush to turn loose their charges.

"Take this side, Henry," yelled the Kid, "I'll take the other! Tie up one foot if they won't lead. Here's Merry Hell for a fact!"

There is nothing more terrible than a night fire at a race track. The flimsy buildings, loaded with feed and straw, yielded to the breath of the Scarlet Demon as a train of powder spreads from a single match. Panic-stricken horses had but one instinct—to remain in the stalls that had always meant safety and comfort. They could not believe that in the hour of peril security was to be found elsewhere than home.

In the crimson-splashed darkness, men and boys struggled with blindfolded horses, tugging them toward the grass infield where they were turned loose, to stand trembling, or to run wild as terror prompted. Pandemonium increased. Trainers, armed with brooms, stood at the gates, beating back the horses that tried to return to the Inferno. Tiny apprentice boys, negro swipes, and hustlers like Henry the Rat and the Information Kid, whose motto of life was: "What's in it?" risked their lives again and again in behalf of dumb animals they neither owned nor knew. Swearing through smoke-filled lungs, they held to the blistering task.

Relief came in half an hour on the wings of the north wind. Boreas reinforced the counter-attack of the firefighters, and the flames were driven back at the gap which stretched between the Montgomery barns and those to the north. Gradually, the red flare subsided, but until dawn came, the great circle inside the mile track was a prison yard where kings and queens of the turf with sacks over their heads, galloped amuck, and no reckoning of loss could be made.

Then, in the morning, the work of checking up began. The first train brought its cargo of anxious owners across the border, and through the day others trickled in from their Sunday lay-off. Late in the afternoon there stumbled through the south gate a little shriveled old man in faded clothes. He was Jim Dunlap, known to the world of the paddock as "old Jimmy Whiskers." He spotted the Information Kid sleepily munching a sandwich outside the track restaurant, and he clawed at the hustler's coat. The old man's lips worked mutely a moment, then the word came:

"Polly?"

"Up in smoke," said the Kid, wearily, "she and about nineteen others. I just been looking over the list."

A bullet through the heart might have produced much the same external effect on Jimmy Whiskers.

THE EMPTY STALL

His eyes glazed, his body twitched spasmodically, and he toppled toward the hustler, clawing for support.

The Kid hoisted his sandwich out of danger. "Now, now, Jimmy," he protested, "don't throw no fit around here. Cut it out, pal—I've been through enough for one day; leggo me!" He shoved the wilted figure toward a chair, and frowned disapprovingly.

Old Jimmy Whiskers' shrunken body continued to jerk and quiver, fingers twitching at his gray beard, eyes staring vacantly at the ground. Presently the sobs came—harsh shuddering sounds that emanated grotesquely from the diaphragm, and racked his frame.

"My—Polly—Oliver!" he choked. "Gone—Polly Oliver!"

The Information Kid munched at his sandwich, eyes contemplating dispassionately the elder horseman.

Out from the clerk's quarters, and across the lawn in their direction, came "Black" Murdoch, trainer for Baltimore Ryan, heavy between the shoulders, narrow between the eyes, dark of visage, and darker still in his ways. He saw the crumpled figure on the chair, stopped—hesitated—and then approached, bandaged hands swinging at his sides.

"Bit of tough luck, Jimmy," he commiserated. "I tried to get your filly out but I couldn't quite make it; damn' near cost me my hands. Fire started next stable to ours, you know—and we didn't have much time. Too bad—nice little filly—figured to be a queen all right. I was wondering if you had her insured?"

The question was a natural one, but something in the trainer's voice prompted the Information Kid to direct at Murdoch a swift look from shrewd gray eyes.

Dunlap's head wagged a dull negative. He was still dazed, bereft of speech.

"Too bad," said Murdoch. "You should have protected yourself, Jim. Anything I can do?"

The old man shook his head again. Murdoch's beetled eyebrows turned in the direction of the Information Kid, but the latter was apparently engrossed in the task of rolling a cigarette with one hand. He showed no interest in the conversation.

"I'm shipping to New Orleans," Murdoch continued, "can't get any accommodations here now. I'd offer you a job, Jimmy—but the boss has given me the word to cut down. The Sheridan stables need help; see them, Jimmy—and don't take it too hard. We all get our bumps, man—all get 'em!"

THE EMPTY STALL

Polly Oliver's owner gave no sign that he heard. Murdoch wavered irresolutely, and then moved away with an awkward: "Well, so long, old man—I got to be moving."

The Information Kid watched the trainer's retreating form until it disappeared. Then he eyed again the broken figure in the chair. Once or twice the hustler moved as though to speak, but the look on the face of Jimmy Whiskers checked the impulse. Leaning against the paddock wall, he inhaled deeply, and blew thin sprays of gray smoke toward the lavender mountains that buttressed the horizon. Deep in the recesses of his whimsical imagination, the seed of a hunch was germinating.

There was no racing that afternoon. The Information Kid spent the time in a billiard hall outside the track, dexterously manipulating the ivories, but his thoughts all the while were building up a vision of a certain gallant little filly, now gone like Hiawatha "in the glory of the sunset, in the purple mists of evening."

At dusk, the Kid wandered back to the track, and, passing the scene of the fire, saw old Jimmy Whiskers, hat in hand, standing at the smoldering grave of his sweetheart.

"Huh," grunted the Kid, "I'll tell the cock-eyed world there's a picture! Believe me or no,

gents—that old guy's heart is right there under them ashes; yea, bo!"

In all truth, the Information Kid, quixotic child of the race track, had diagnosed the case correctly. Jimmy Whiskers was a foolish old man, and Polly Oliver was the inspiration of his fading years, the sublime glory of his universe; the beautiful "Annabelle Lee" of his dreams. Strange things happen on a race track where human derelicts and equine aristocrats fashion bonds which are beyond the comprehension of the outside world.

Polly Oliver was worthy of any man's love—a deep-bosomed two-year old of exquisite proportions, eyes full of fire and fervor, ears alert and slightly tapering, throat clean-cut, and small head molded after her mother, who was in turn removed by only two generations from a mare of blessed memory, the first of her sex to lead home a Derby field. Polly was by the Duke Oliver out of Lady Fidelity, and she was a bay which is the color of horse efficiency, and held by many to be more truly the Arab stock than the white.

When Polly Oliver was a yearling, galloping on the Ryan stock farm, old Jimmy Whiskers showed up one day with five thousand dollars accumulated by saving one dollar bills over a period of fifteen years. Also he held an option on the nursery

THE EMPTY STALL

class, given him by Baltimore Ryan as a reward for long and faithful toil in the latter's service. Out of twenty sleek and well-groomed youngsters, Ryan's former employer selected Lady Fidelity's daughter, and led her away triumphantly. Not until six months afterwards, did old Jimmy Whiskers learn that "Black" Murdoch had hidden away from him that day a half-sister to Polly Oliver, out of a different mother but sired by the same gallant stallion. The two fillies were identical in appearance save that Polly had a white stocking on the right-hind ankle. Murdoch had his own opinion as to their respective values, and he was not the sort of man to drop a pearl into the lap of a man like Dunlap. A disgruntled groom carried the story to Jimmy Whiskers, but the latter made no protest. He believed that his word against Murdoch's would be futile. But that was not the real reason that he held his peace. The romance between Polly Oliver and her new owner began with the first caress of his wrinkled hand and the responsive nudge of her velvet muzzle against his shoulder in the seclusion of a box car. The man had no other interest in life; no other hope; no other love. All his years he had lived with horses, feeding them, rubbing them, blanketing them, fondling them—but this was the first he had ever owned. Polly Oliver

was *his*, and, through the mysterious channels of magnetism to which the thoroughbred is subject by nature, the daughter of Lady Fidelity understood these things, and was very content.

Now, it came to pass that in the classic Nursery Stakes, fifteen two-year olds lined up at the barrier for their maiden scramble, and Polly Oliver, ridden by "Bubbles" Jackson, sixteen and chocolate-hued, came home in front at 20 to 1. Six lengths behind was Lantana, the very same half-sister so zealously hidden away by "Black" Murdoch. That victory brimmed the cup of happiness for Polly's owner, and anointed the bonds that bound the bay princess to her master. Subsequent workouts left little doubt that Polly Oliver, under the handling of Jimmy Whiskers, was destined to prove a better horse than the one retained by Murdoch.

All these things and a few others were in the mind of the Information Kid who won his pseudonym by acquiring and retaining just such knowledge. That night he broached the subject to Henry the Rat.

"Did it strike you there was anything queer about that fire, Henry?"

For once, Henry was disposed to think that something was actually on the square. "I understand they was shooting craps in the Waterford

THE EMPTY STALL

feed room, and some guy knocked a lamp into the hay."

"I don't mean that," the Kid told him. "The fire was an accident all right. What I'm getting at is this: Seems like they had plenty of time to get all the horses out of the Baltimore stables, didn't they?"

"They did get 'em out," said Henry, "all except Polly Oliver, and she don't belong to the string. I guess they forgot about her. Dunlap was away."

"All right," said the Kid, "here's a little medicine for your bum ear, and for Gawd's sake don't spill it."

"Shoot," said Henry.

The Information Kid unpealed his hunch. "Jimmy Whiskers was away," he reminded, "and Polly Oliver, the baby that showed up all the Ryan youngsters, and was poison in the eyes of Black Murdoch, was temporarily in a stall under the same roof. Remember, Henry, what Murdoch said that time when old Jimmy was boasting how his filly run her half-sister deaf, dumb and blind?"

"In the paddock at Latonia?" questioned Henry. "I get you: he made a crack about Polly running her next race in the morgue if he had his way about it. I never saw a guy so sore."

RIDERS UP!

"That's it, boy; and now he says he burned his hands trying to get her out. Ain't that a beautiful reversal of form?"

"Whoops!" scoffed the Rat. "He probably burned his hands tying her in!"

"Henry," said the Kid, "I take back what I told you last night."

"What was that?"

"About you being so awful dumb. You don't know much about horses, Henry—but I'll tell the wicked world you can smell out a crook nice and pretty."

"Sure," agreed the Rat complacently, "that guy Murdoch is so crooked he has to sleep across three beds. Now that I think of it, the filly was in the last stall this way and they had all the time in the world to get her."

The Information Kid nodded drowsily. "Right," he confirmed, "that stuff about Murdoch's hands being burned, and the sympathy chatter I heard him hand old Jimmy—goes for the end book. I know now why he beat it so quick. The filly was murdered. That's muh diamond special, gents—take it or leave it!"

"Pretty good tip at that," acknowledged Henry, "what you going to do about it?"

"Nothing," said the Kid, "and you do the same,

THE EMPTY STALL

see? Just stick it in the old hat band, and don't let the wind play no tricks."

"A word to the wise," orated Henry, "is as good as a kick in the slats. What time you getting up?"

"About five o'clock."

This was a professional pleasantry. The Information Kid arose at 3:30, taking good care not to disturb the slumbers of his colleague. A certain horse shipped from Reno for a killing, was due for a secret workout. The Kid knew it, and Henry didn't. Being fellow-hustlers they went fifty-fifty on all matters not directly connected with their main object in life. When it came to uncovering the day's best bet in behalf of their clients, they strove zealously to gyp each other, trading tips only when each believed that the other had the horse with the longest price.

The good thing lived up to its works, and subsequently won by three lengths. That race put the Information Kid on easy street, and for several days he forgot all about old Jimmy Whiskers and the latter's bereavement. The matter was recalled to mind in a way that fixed itself permanently in his imagination.

Space was at a premium, but there was an empty stall in the Sheridan barns where the owner of Polly Oliver was now working as a groom.

RIDERS UP!

The Information Kid, on his eternal quest for knowledge, came upon this gap in the ranks of horseflesh.

The feed box had been recently replenished and a fresh bucket of water was placed just outside. New blankets hung over the half-door, and on the wall there was a new halter ornamented by a faded bow of gray and lavender.

Around the corner of the barn came Dunlap, quiet and unobtrusive as usual.

"H'lo, Jimmy," the Kid greeted. "What belongs in here?"

The old man turned placid eyes upon the hustler.

"That's my stall."

"Your stall? You got another horse?"

"Nope, never will own but the one I guess. She's good enough for me, Kid; good enough for old Jimmy."

He disappeared into an adjoining stall, and clucked persuasively to a 5 year old black gelding who was due for a workout. The Information Kid wrinkled his nose, stared blankly a moment, and then went in search of Steve Borrell who trained for Sheridan. He located the trainer in another barn.

"Say," he demanded, "What's the idea of old Jimmy Whiskers renting that empty stall?"

THE EMPTY STALL

Borrell spread his hands deprecatingly. "I'm just humoring him. He's a good man around horses, and most swipes are cuckoo about something or other. He's keeping Polly Oliver alive in his memory, and paying for it out of his wages. It's either that or the long black box for the old fool. He was nuts about that filly. I figure it will wear off. Who do you like in the handicap?"

"I'm giving Captain Adams on his works. He's been getting bad rides. If they switch to a good boy this afternoon, look out."

Borrell nodded and moved away. The Information Kid swung over to the track, perched on the top rail, and clocked a few babies from the Driscoll string. They were a poor lot, and he gave it up, his mind reverting to that empty stall with the newly-filled fodder trough.

"Well," he mused, "I'll tell the cock-eyed world a racetrack is a funny place. Think of a guy paying out his wages on an empty stall, and fitting it out with food and water for a horse that's dead. *Pitiful*, says I—that's the word, gents—*pitiful as hell!*"

In the succeeding days, the story of Jimmy Whiskers and his empty stall gradually spread around the track, and was even chronicled in the papers by the turf reporters as a bit of "human interest copy." The subject, however, was worthy

RIDERS UP!

of only passing interest. In the language of the hardboots, the old man was a "goofy," and that's all there was to it. The Information Kid alone remained impressed. That was because his favorite literature, outside of the overnight entries, was the *Arabian Nights*. His imagination was forever bridging the gap between those classic tales and the oddities of modern life as seen through the eyes of a hustler. Openly he espoused the cause of Jimmy Whiskers, and the latter responded by unbosoming himself of the idea that was keeping the old man alive.

"You mark my words, Kid," he said, one afternoon, "just as sure as we're talking right here, some night I'll wake up, and see Polly Oliver standing outside her stall, waiting for me to let her in. I got up three times last night and looked out. Seemed like I could almost hear her walking towards me. I ain't crazy."

"Of course, you ain't," the Kid agreed, "if you feel that strong about her, it's a hunch, and you're perfectly right in playin' it that way."

"You see, Kid, she was my horse, and she got so she could talk to me——"

"Talk?"

"Well, you know what I mean. Once she was acting fretful before a race, and neither her jock or any one else could tell what was the matter

THE EMPTY STALL

until I come along. Then Polly she looks at me with those beautiful eyes of hers, and whimpered a bit—and I just seemed to know there was a foxtail in her nose. Nobody could figure out how I guessed it so quick. The answer was that Polly told me; just like I knew something terrible had happened the night of the fire. I was in a theater, and I got right up and come out. But I missed the night train, and had to lay over. Now, I'm telling you—Kid—my little girl is speaking to me again. Some day, she's going to find her way home, and that's why I'm keeping the stall always ready."

The Information Kid's eyes softened. He laid a consoling hand on the other's shoulder. "That's right, Jimmy—keep the home fires burning. Keep the old head up, says I. That's muh rule of life, pal—keep the old head up. And if you got a good hunch—ride it, bo, ride it!"

Under this sort of encouragement, Jimmy Whiskers retained his empty stall, and patiently awaited the time when Polly Oliver should emulate the fabled Phoenix, and rise miraculously from the mass of scorched flesh and bones long since buried in Mexican soil.

The days passed. The bugle continued to call the bang tails to the post—youngsters, veterans, selling platers, stake horses, all had their oppor-

RIDERS UP!

tunity. One after another the feature events of the season were run off; "good things" materialized or blew up; men ran shoestrings into bank-rolls, tempted their luck too much, and went back to washing dishes. But the name of Polly Oliver graced no entry list, and the gray and lavender colors remained pinned to an empty halter in a vacant stall. Get-Away-Day came, marking another dispersal for the tribe of the whip and spurs. Some stables were moving south to Mexico City, others to Tijuana, but the majority looked northward to winter quarters on home soil. The Sheridan string was scheduled to campaign at New Orleans, the destination of most of the special trains that were puffing toward the border.

"Going to follow the stable, Jimmy?" questioned the Information Kid.

The old man acquiesced dully. "Guess I'll have to, son. Mr. Borrell is going to save me a stall. He's pretty nice, Kid, pretty nice."

"Still buying feed for Polly Oliver, Jimmy? Still figure she'll show up?"

Dunlap nodded, but his faded eyes were misty, and his face downcast. The Information Kid looked away, appreciating that it was going to be hard for Jimmy Whiskers to keep up the fiction,

THE EMPTY STALL

once he had turned his back on the spot where he had last seen his beloved filly alive.

"Distance don't mean nothing to a stake horse," the Kid comforted. "She could come to New Orleans just as well as anywhere, Jimmy. Like as not she may be there already, just waiting for you to show up."

"Think so, Kid? Sometimes I feel at night that if I was to get up and just walk, and walk, and walk until I couldn't go any further—Polly would come the balance of the way to meet me."

Jimmy's auditor deemed it advisable to say:

"Don't do nothing like that. Just work nice and pretty for the Sheridan outfit and stick close to Polly's stall at nights, so you won't miss her when she comes looking for you, see? I'll hunt you up when we get to New Orleans."

But, when, a week later, the new arrivals were settled in the park outside the Crescent City, Fate ordained that the Sheridan stables should directly adjoin the Baltimore Ryan quarters, and that Black Murdoch should learn from the lips of Steve Borrell about Jimmy Whiskers and the vacant stall that was reserved for Polly Oliver.

"The old fool," said Murdoch. "I saw the filly burn up with my own eyes. Got the scars yet from trying to get her out. I wouldn't encourage a nut like that, Steve. No telling what he's liable

RIDERS UP!

to do. I wouldn't trust him around my horses. If he says Polly Oliver to me, I'll crown him."

Borrell pursed his lips thoughtfully. "You may be right at that," he admitted. "I thought the thing would wear off, but the old man seems to be getting worse. Guess I'd better let him go before he starts something."

But Sheridan's trainer was spared the necessity of dismissing Jimmy Whiskers. From a stall just back of where the two men had been standing, Polly's owner had overheard the conversation. The next day he voluntarily moved his belongings to a barn at the extreme end of the grounds, and thereafter shunned human intercourse as much as possible. The Information Kid learned the reason for this move, and expressed his sentiments concerning Murdoch in three languages, English, Mexican, and profane.

"Don't you mind that guy, old-timer," he said to Dunlap. "He's just afraid Polly will come back and beat Lantana."

"She'll do it, too," said Jimmy Whiskers. "Kid, something tells me I'm pretty near to Polly—pretty near the end of the trail, Kid."

The Information Kid shot a swift glance at the old man, but said nothing. He kept his peace until he and Henry the Rat were alone in the

THE EMPTY STALL

room that they shared downtown. Then he bared his thoughts.

"You know, Henry—I think old Whiskers is about through. The old boy is failing pretty fast. He can't kid himself along much further."

"Well," said the Rat, "he ought to take a shot at Murdoch before he goes. They tell me Polly's half-sister come pretty near turning the trick herself."

The Information Kid was interested. "Yeah, how's that?"

"Kicked Murdoch in the ribs, and put him in the hospital for three weeks. I was talking to a stable kid this morning, and he says Lantana's been a different horse ever since the fire. Works fine, but goes crazy if she hears Murdoch's voice—just sweats and trembles all over. Blackie has to signal his orders to the exercise kid. If the filly hears his voice, it's all off."

The Information Kid was thrilled. "You see, Henry?" he exclaimed—"That poetry I was reading you wasn't the bunk at all. Lantana knows what happened to her sister. A horse can see things that we can't. I tell you, Henry—a crook has got no chance to win the confidence of a thoroughbred."

"You said something," muttered the Rat drowsily, "I hope she croaks him."

RIDERS UP!

They slept the sleep of the just. Three mornings later, with the cold wind of dawn whistling down the back stretch, the Kid perched shivering on the top rail, watch in hand, drearily performing the duties of his office. His eyes were on the distant half-mile post when the gray shadow of a horse broke from canter to full stride as it passed that point. Automatically, the Kid's thumb pressed downward. The watch clicked, and across its surface a hand moved jerkily. The equine shadow was lost in the darkness of the far turn, but presently the muffled beat of hoofs sounded into the stretch and a little later a single horse came flashing along the rail, its rider sitting low in the saddle. They were gone again like the wind, but not before the Kid's watch had clicked again. He noted the time, and whistled incredulously. Then he slid from his perch, and cut sharply across the infield to assure himself that he had made no mistake regarding the identity of the speed marvel. A groom with a blanket ran out from the Ryan barns.

"It's Lantana, all right," the Kid muttered. "Murdoch is up to his old tricks. Two races in which she doesn't show a thing, and now, here she is, in bandages and ice, and ready to run over the moon. I suppose they'll turn on the speed faucet in the Juvenile Stakes next Saturday.

THE EMPTY STALL

Forty to one and their money back. What a beautiful thought!"

He made his way soberly to the track restaurant humming the national anthem of the hustlers: "Every little movement has a meaning all its own."

He was crouching over a plate of ham and eggs, dreamily meditating on the significance of that early morning workout, when knife and fork slipped from his grasp and he jerked himself upright, knocking a cup of hot coffee into the lap of a fellow patron at his side.

"May the Lord bless the King of the World," he gasped, quoting from his beloved *Arabian Nights*. "Thy servant beats your commands on his head——"

"Say, what the hell's the idea?" protested the recipient of the hot coffee. "You looking for a crack in the jaw, or sump'n?"

The Information Kid blinked stupidly. "Excuse me, pal," he pleaded, "I just thought of something." Mechanically, he swabbed the trousers of the indignant victim, tossed the napkin aside, and headed for the door.

"Hey!" commanded the cashier. "This ain't a Salvation Army booth. Come back here!"

The Kid apologized a second time, and slid a half dollar along the counter. "My mistake and

your treat," he muttered, and made his way out, leaving behind him an unfinished breakfast, and a puzzled proprietor.

Once outside, he paused to twist one ear reflectively and stare at the brightening sky.

"Gawdamighty!" he breathed, "either I'm full of hop, or I know something. Yea bo, I'm going down in the old pickle vat after this one. Before you're much balder, gents—I'll have the answer in my lily white mitt."

But it was three days before the Information Kid, smart hustler that he was, had come to certain conclusions; three days of nervous tension such as he had seldom known; cautious maneuvering that finally brought him to the point where nothing remained but a take-a-chance bet with the possibility of dire consequences. On the afternoon of the third day, he strolled down to Jimmy Whisker's hermitage.

The old man was sitting on a stool in the fading sunlight, plaiting a bit of rope. He nodded a return to the Kid's greeting.

"Still got the old fodder-trough filled, Jimmy?"

Dunlap's lips quivered. "Reckon I'm pretty much of an old fool, Kid—but there don't seem nothing else for me to do, but just sit here and wait. Last night I dreamed about Polly again. I was in the paddock with her—and she was just

THE EMPTY STALL

going to the post in the Juvenile Stakes—had my colors plaited in her mane—and I was talkin' to her—talking to—talkin'." He stopped, and bent his head.

The Information Kid lit a cigarette, and spoke rapidly.

"It's a hunch, pal—it's a sure-fire hunch. Dreamed about her myself last night. Swear to Gawd I did. Told Henry the Rat there was somethin' doing. 'Fat chance!' says he. 'Never mind,' says I. There's lots of funny things happen on a track. Keep the old head up just a little bit longer, Jimmy—keep the home fires burnin' for Polly Oliver."

"I will," said Jimmy Whiskers, "she was my horse."

"Atta ol' boy!" said the Kid, "just wait nice and pretty."

He waved a careless hand, walked on up the track, and paused around the turn.

"I'll do it!" he decided. "Shoot the whole works," says I, "play your horse right on his old smeller, and if you can't bear to watch it, close your eyes 'til it's over!"

He pulled his cap more firmly over his eyes, and stalked toward the Torrington barns where a crap game usually started after the last race.

At ten o'clock that night, the Information Kid

RIDERS UP!

entered the lobby of the little hotel just outside the stable entrance to the track, spotted Black Murdoch sitting in his accustomed place, and made his way to the side of the trainer.

"Come on outside," he whispered. "I've got something important for you."

The hustler's manner was impressive. Murdoch arose and followed his visitor to the sidewalk.

"Now," said the Kid, "you had the right dope about old Jimmy Whiskers being dangerous. That empty stall is the bunk, understand? You've been heading for a sweet little death right along, and you never got wise. Come with me, and you'll learn something."

Murdoch's swarthy visage blanched.

"What are you handing me?" he growled.

"I'm handing you the best tip you ever got in your life," the Kid assured him. "Don't ask no more questions, but come with me, and I'll show you the world's champion frame-up."

"Where?"

"In an empty stall. Jimmy Whiskers ain't there. Hurry it up, I tell you. This is life or death."

The Kid had judged his man correctly. Murdoch accompanied him, asking questions as he went along.

THE EMPTY STALL

"Keep your shirt on," the hustler told him. "You'll see the whole thing in a minute."

They turned in through the gate, showing their badges to a watchman, and walked north in the darkness until they came to the Sheridan barns. The Kid took his companion by the arm.

"In here," he directed, "and for Gawd's sake, don't strike no matches. It's the third stall on the left."

"I thought the old fool had moved out of here," said Murdoch.

"That's the point," retorted the Kid. "He's moving back. Here we are. Now, can you make out what's under the feed-box?"

"I can't see. It's too dark."

"Bend down like I am. Now feel what I got in my hands."

Murdoch's body bent forward. His fingers groped along the Kid's arms, and suddenly encountered cold steel that imprisoned both wrists with a sinister click. The spasmodic upward fling of the trainer's arms was checked by a chain that connected handcuffs to fodder-trough. At almost the same instant, a light dustcloth, with a sponge as gag, was passed swiftly over Murdoch's mouth and tied in back. He struggled desperately against a rope that was drawn tight around his ankles—lost his balance—and toppled prostrate.

RIDERS UP!

The Information Kid left the stall, walked along the corridor, and turned on a wall light. Then he came back, and surveyed his captive.

"Some little frame-up, ain't it, pal?" he leered, and in his voice there was a note that struck terror to the heart of Murdoch. Guttural pleadings escaped from the sponge and wrappings.

"No use," said the Kid. "From now on, I'm going to do all the talking. I'm going to tell you the story of Jimmy Whiskers and the empty stall that he's been keeping for a dead horse."

And there in the semi-darkness, the Kid leaned calmly against the wooden partition and narrated the romance of an old man and his lost love. It was a curious version, embroidered with phrases that the narrator had absorbed from the *Arabian Nights*, and interspersed with the whimsical slang of the race track. And it reached a conclusion as fantastic and startling as the setting in which it was told. The Information Kid wagged a finger at his sole auditor.

"And so, Murdoch—the old guy is just hanging on from day to day, waiting for Polly Oliver. He thinks Polly will come to life again. 'He's crazy,' says you, and of course you're right. The little filly is under the dirt in Mexico. You let her burn. And just because you did, pal—just because Polly can't come back to Jimmy Whis-

THE EMPTY STALL

kers, you're going to *the same place she went, and you're going in the very same way*. I said you were going to learn something, didn't I? All right, you're going to learn the shortest cut to hell."

The figure on the floor threshed in a convulsion of protest. The Information Kid disappeared a moment, and came back with an armful of straw. He vanished again, and returned carrying a five-gallon coal oil can, the contents of which he emptied on the floor and walls of the stall. The cold liquid soaked through and reached the skin of Black Murdoch. It was no colder than the sweat that beaded his gray face. From one pocket the Kid produced the stump of a candle. He lit it, and gingerly made a place for the flaming wax in a corner where it could burn down to within reach of the soaked straw. Then he nodded grimly at his victim.

"You have my best regards," he admonished softly, "and may your conscience guide you! So long!"

Ten feet down the corridor he stopped and waited for the situation to work its charm. Presently he retraced his steps. Apparently the Kid only wished to assure himself that the gag was still secure. He fumbled clumsily a moment, and then the sponge and cloth slipped from place.

RIDERS UP!

Instantly, Murdoch spun over on his chest, striving desperately to fight off the gag. The truth foamed from his lips as fast as shattered nerves could hurl it.

"She's alive—I tell you!—Polly's alive! I didn't burn her! For God's sake, Kid—let me go—Listen, Kid—listen!"

"You're a liar," said the Kid. "Polly's dead."

Murdoch's head rolled in frenzied negative.

"I switched 'em," he gasped, "switched 'em during the fire. I tell you I did. I tied Lantana in her sister's stall. Took Polly away and covered up her white stockings with dye and then bandages. Forty to one next Saturday. Don't squeal, Kid—and we'll split. My God, boy, there's a fortune in it for both of us. Let me up, Kid. Don't look at me like that. We're pals now, ain't we?"

The Information Kid drew a deep breath. Victory was his.

"What could be fairer?" he said, and knocked the candle into a pool of liquid on the floor. Murdoch hunched away.

"Only water," assured the Kid pleasantly. "This straw wouldn't burn now on a bet. Blackie, you ain't got much nerve after all. You never should have asked old Jimmy whether he had Polly insured. You were scared that if she was

THE EMPTY STALL

covered some of these insurance wiseheimers would want proof before they paid their dough out. You made a second mistake when you let Polly work a half-mile in .47 without first putting knockout-drops in muh coffee. Yea bo! Lantana couldn't work quite that fast on this track."

He loosened the leather strap around Murdoch's legs and the latter arose clumsily, holding out his manacled wrists. The Kid felt for the key, found it, and the handcuffs opened. Murdoch stretched his brawny arms and then lashed out with a huge doubled fist. The Information Kid crumpled against the wall.

"That's where you made *your* mistake," grunted Murdoch, and was in the act of swinging again, when three figures rushed from the adjoining stall, and overpowered him. He looked up to recognize Baltimore Ryan, his employer. The other two men were clad in the uniform of track police. Ryan's eyes were ablaze, for the gentleman from Baltimore was a sportsman of the first water.

"Murdoch," said Ryan grimly, "these men will take you as far as the street. You're a crook, a coward, and a murderer. Don't ever let me hear of you trying to enter any race track in America so long as you live. Now, unless this young man has a charge to prefer against you——"

RIDERS UP!

"Huh!" said the Kid, "that guy will remember me without no further help."

"All right," said Ryan. "Take him out of here before I kill him."

A few minutes later, the sportsman from Baltimore and the Information Kid entered the Ryan barns, and made their way to Lantana's stall, where a two-year-old bay flexed dainty ears forward and back, and stomped restlessly. The Kid produced a knife, slit the bandages from the filly's right hind leg, and rubbed the hair gently with a sponge soaked in turpentine. Ryan directed the rays of a pocket lamp downward. The brown hair lost color gradually, changing to a streaky white.

"That's enough," said Ryan. "It's Polly all right, and for the sake of old Jimmy I'm mighty glad of it."

"You're a sport," affirmed the hustler. "Let's take her where she belongs."

He slipped a halter over Polly's handsome head, and led the daughter of Lady Fidelity out on the tanbark, Ryan walking at his side.

Night's soft hands had smoothed away the wrinkles of dilapidation from the old park. Once again the ancient moon was smiling down upon earth's children. The shingled temples of the thoroughbred rimmed a race track that in

THE EMPTY STALL

turn circled a vast expanse of emerald lawn. Hustler and millionaire paused outside the hermitage of old Jimmy Whiskers. Polly Oliver raised her head interrogatively, and stared at her surroundings.

"Here, you hold her," said the Kid. "This is going to be good."

He tip-toed toward the open half-door of a stall where a bow of gray and lavender ribbon hung on the wall. The door yielded to his hand. He lit a match, and by its flare saw the figure of old Jimmy Whiskers asleep on the floor. One arm was outstretched as though in search of something that was not there. The match burned itself out. A lump rose in the Kid's throat.

"Gee," he breathed, "I'm sure going to get a swell kick out of this! It's just like them tales in the book. How does that one start now? Oh, ye-ah—'Praise be to Allah, the Beneficent King, Lord of the Three Worlds; Blessing be upon our Lord Mohammed and upon His Family and Companion Train. It has reached me, O Auspicious King——'"

He bent down and shook the old man gently by the shoulder.

"Hey, Jimmy," he whispered. "Wake up, old-timer. Polly Oliver's come home!"

(3)

THE END

A READER'S GUIDE TO FICTION

A VOYAGE TO THE ISLAND OF THE ARTICOLES

By ANDRÉ MAUROIS. A delicious story of a wonderful voyage to the island of the "Art-for-Art-Sakers" by the author of *Disraeli*. Translated by David Garnett. Illustrated with woodcuts. \$1.50.

KIF: AN UNVARNISHED HISTORY

By GORDON DAVIOT. Kif is a young man who drifted into the devious ways impelled by circumstance; his story has been told with great skill and reality in this exciting novel. \$2.50.

THE VALLEY OF OLYMPUS

By OCTAVUS ROY COHEN. A rollicking romance of a man who married a movie star—one of Mr. Cohen's best novels. \$2.00.

THE LADDER OF FOLLY

By MURIEL HINE. Ann Massingby, child of nature, her emergence into a brilliant social world, her ascent upon the "ladder of folly" are delicately pictured by Muriel Hine in this romance. \$2.00.

EYELIDS OF THE MORN

By WIJNANT JOHNSTON. Of great beauty, delicacy and charm, this novel is to be recommended to the discriminating reader. \$2.00.

ROGUES IN CLOVER

By PERCIVAL WILDE. Card tricks and card tricksters figure in this clever and amusing story of a likable character. \$2.00.

STILLBORN

By LILLIAN EICHLER. A remarkably human story of a young priest—a frank yet tolerant novel that will cause much discussion. \$2.00.

BARBARIAN

By DICKSON SKINNER. The story of a young man who was determined to be successful in modern business—an outspoken study that is penetrating. \$2.00.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

35 WEST 32ND STREET

NEW YORK

SOME DIVERTING NOVELS

THE CHILDREN

By EDITH WHARTON. A gaily enchanting story of a troop of modern youngsters and their much divorced parents. Out of a myriad of praise, we quote one that has proved a true prophecy. "More than likely to prove the most popular novel Mrs. Wharton has ever penned."—*The New York Times*.

ABBÉ PIERRE'S PEOPLE

By JAY WILLIAM HUDSON. A serene and smiling book full of the age old beauty of the Gascon countryside is this new story about the beloved Abbé and his flock.

SILAS BRADFORD'S BOY

By JOSEPH C. LINCOLN. "You'll like the humor of *Silas Bradford's Boy*, the fresh salt breezes, and the variety of good sea-minded folk of Denboro."—*The Philadelphia Public Ledger*.

A LANTERN IN HER HAND

By BESS STREETER ALDRICH. A rich and happy story of a pioneer mother and her sturdy family. "As thrilling and joyously fresh as the prairie sky."—*St. Louis Times*.

THE SONS OF CAIN

By JAMES WARNER BELLAH. A novel of a man and woman caught in the stress of great events. "With crisp, barbed sentences and electric words, Mr. Bellah paints an arresting panorama of the London of that time (1918)."—*New York Herald-Tribune*.

ARMY WITH BANNERS

By RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL. An adroitly presented and shrewdly characterized novel of a woman evangelist and the lively happenings at her "Hallelujah Temple".

THEY RETURN AT EVENING

By H. R. WAKEFIELD. A collection of ghost stories written with great distinction. "Little masterpieces of suggested terror."—*The Hartford Courant*.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

35 WEST 32ND STREET

NEW YORK

